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April 12, 2001

## Let Nurses Be Nurses

**T**he Nursing Shortage

To the Editor:

An April 8 front-page article about the nursing shortage correctly cites low pay and mandatory overtime as major issues for the profession, but leaves the impression that the physical demands alone contribute to significant numbers of nurses abandoning their jobs. I disagree.

As a registered nurse who took care of very sick, hospitalized patients, I didn't resent the physical part of the job as much as not being able to perform the functions that I was trained to do.

Most of the demanding physical labor should be performed by nurses' aides. This frees up the nurses to do their crucial job: checking and dispensing medication, reviewing doctors' orders, speaking with the pharmacist or dietitian, patient assessment and education, discharge planning and so on.

As long as nurses are forced to be their own aides, they will never be able to fulfill their role as medical caregivers. ROBERTA SALES

New York, April 10, 2001

To the Editor:

"Nursing Shortage Is Raising Worries on Patients' Care" (front page, April 8) did not mention one obvious solution that could have an immediate effect: immigration.

Until 1995, there was a temporary visa category for nurses called the H-1A visa that allowed health care employers to recruit foreign nurses. The visa program worked quite well, but the program was allowed to expire as a result of intense lobbying by nursing unions, which convinced members of Congress that there was actually an excess supply of American nurses.

The H-1A visa program should be brought back on a permanent basis. This year, legislation is likely to be introduced in Congress that would do just that. One hopes that the unions complaining the most about double shifts will not stand in the way. GREGORY SISKIND

Cordova, Tenn., April 8, 2001

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The writer is an immigration lawyer.

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