



**National
Nurses
United**

The National Voice for Direct-Care RNs

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We're Taking a Stand for Our Patients

An Open Letter to the Washington Hospital Center Community

February 22, 2011

Dear Colleague:

We are writing to update you on our ongoing efforts to improve patient care and overall conditions at the hospital, and the status of collective bargaining between our union, National Nurses United (NNU), and management of Washington Hospital Center.

The undersigned are all members of the union's negotiations team. Many of us have spent our entire nursing careers here. We have seen top administrators, managers and supervisors come and go. Through all these changes we, along with all of our colleagues, go on caring for our patients and for each other. From our perspective at the bedside, we are deeply concerned about the future of patient care in our hospital.

From the very beginning of negotiations for a successor contract last year, our number one concern was to ensure that nurses at Washington Hospital Center are empowered and sufficiently staffed to deliver the highest quality patient care and that we receive the respect and dignity that professionals who devote their lives and careers to healing deserve. Unfortunately, management came to negotiations with a hostile attitude and with a clear agenda of rolling back the standards that registered nurses at our facility had struggled to attain over the years.

Everyone who works in clinical care at the hospital knows there is deep dissatisfaction about patient care standards. The hospital administration finally released its internal survey of hospital employees and physicians conducted last spring and summer which found that a significant percentage of WHC employees and doctors believe the hospital is lacking in patient safety. Of the 12 indicators of "patient safety culture" identified in the survey, not one was ranked as a "strength" by the 4,400 WHC employees and physicians who participated. Indicators that were identified as weak by the survey (with fewer than 50% of respondents giving a positive response) were staffing, handoffs and transitions, teamwork across units, and non-punitive response to error. In addition, Washington Hospital Center had the worst results of the eight MedStar Health hospitals surveyed and also compared unfavorably to the average of hundreds of hospitals around the country similarly surveyed.

You should know that, despite management's communications inside the hospital to the contrary, the company has not claimed poverty at the bargaining table as its justification for wanting to roll back nursing standards. Management knows it cannot do this because MedStar Health is making money hand over fist. The company made \$142 million in profits last year alone and is sitting on \$1.46 billion in cash and investments.

We were pleased we were able to avert a strike before Thanksgiving when management finally agreed to recognize our new union, to restart bargaining for a new contract, and to delay implementation until March 1, 2011 of its punitive, unilateral take-away of shift differential pay for nurses working evenings, nights and weekends.

Since that time, the union and management have held many bargaining sessions, but many issues remain unresolved. We do not have an agreement on safe nurse staffing and management continues to insist on rolling back standards of hard-working nurses through take-backs of paid time off, changes in health insurance and pension benefits and huge takeaways in pay for nurses who work evenings, nights and weekends.

Accordingly, the registered nurses voted overwhelmingly last week to stage a one-day unfair labor practice strike. Failing our reaching a fair and just contract with management, **the strike will commence at 7:00 a.m. on Friday, March 4, 2011.**

If you value the vital role that registered nurses play at Washington Hospital Center, we strongly encourage you to contact hospital management and urge them to resolve this dispute immediately. There is still time for the parties to come together but it is quickly running out. Please stand with the nurses as we stand up for our patients.

Sincerely,

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