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Bargaining Update #4

On June 26-27, 2017, the fifth and sixth rounds of bargaining took place between your Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) bargaining team and Samaritan Albany General Hospital (SAGH) administration. Over these two days, your team spent a total of 27 hours in bargaining. These sessions produced a few new tentative agreements (TAs), and there was a considerable amount of discussion back and forth between your ONA team and SAGH administration on various issues. However, we were not able to reach a TA on the whole contract. Both sides have agreed to meet again on Monday, July 10.

Major Sticking Points and Concerns

Length of the Contract. The employer is still proposing a 17-month agreement. Your ONA team has made it clear this proposal is not acceptable to our membership.

Wages. The employer is still offering only a 1 percent wage increase. Our ONA team has also made it clear this is not an acceptable proposal, especially when our team has shown the employer that as of July 1, 2017, our nurses’ wages are approximately 6.5 percent behind those at our sister hospital in Corvallis.

Paid time off (PTO). We want to improve PTO so all nurses earn the same amount at each months-of-service level. The employer continues to state current PTO levels are a cost savings, and they are not interested in changing them.

Nurses Raise Money for “Veterans for Vets”

On June 29, 2017, a group of nurses from SAGH helped raise money at a “Veterans for Vets” event at the Willamette Speedway in Lebanon. Congratulations to these nurses, who helped raise $700 for local veterans!

Special thanks to Amina Topp, RN, from the SAGH emergency room, working with the community, and recruiting nurses! Way to go, Amina!

From left to right: Shalleen Foster, RN; Regina Leytem, RN; Connie Crew, RN; Kathie Davis, RN; Genee Hasek, RN; Amina Topp, RN; and Evonna Westlund, RN. On June 29, these nurses helped raise $700 at a “Veterans for Vets” event at the Willamette Speedway in Lebanon.
As nurses, we’re often so busy that we don’t have time to stop and think about contract negotiations or how they impact our day-to-day work lives. Here are some frequently asked questions about the bargaining process to help put things in perspective.

**What does the contract have to do with me?**

Our wages, benefits, and working conditions are all laid out in our contract, also called our collective bargaining agreement (CBA). This contract is the result of negotiations between nurses—through our union, the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA)—and Samaritan Albany General Hospital (SAGH) administration. Because of our union, nurses at SAGH have a legal right to sit down and bargain as equals with the employer. The resulting contract is a legally binding document that both hospital administration and employees are expected to follow.

**What does the bargaining process look like?**

If you’ve ever bought a car, you’ve probably got some idea of what the bargaining process entails. In the case of bargaining at SAGH, ONA nurses and SAGH administration both elect or appoint representatives to sit at the negotiating table on their behalf. Both sides bring their initial proposals to the table, then attempt to negotiate an agreement over them. Sometimes an agreement comes fairly quickly. But in many cases, especially where the initial proposals are far apart, getting to agreement can take much longer. This is often true for economic issues like wages, benefits, differentials, etc.

Both ONA and SAGH administration will bargain until they reach a tentative agreement (TA) on all the proposals. A TA signifies that both sides have pushed as far as they can on their proposals, and that greater movement probably isn’t possible without drastic supportive action by the broader bargaining unit. At that point, the ONA team will bring the TA on a new contract back to the membership for a ratification vote.

If nurses approve the TA, as they did at SAGH in 2014, the new contract goes into effect. If nurses vote down the TA, both bargaining teams goes back to the table. However, a “no” vote often also means that nurses hospital-wide must be willing to take more serious action (like picketing or a strike) to demonstrate their demand for further movement by hospital administration.

**Can I watch the bargaining process in person?**

Yes! In fact, we encourage nurses come to our bargaining sessions. Having nurses in the room with our team shows hospital administration we’re paying attention to what happens at the table. It also reminds our ONA team that we support them! If you want to observe bargaining, contact Christine Hauck at Hauck@OregonRN.org.

**Can I talk about bargaining or the union at work?**

Yes! Obviously, your discussions about negotiations or the union shouldn’t distract from your work. But the law says that if you’re allowed to talk about other non-work-related topics while on your shift (like your kid’s soccer game), talking about the contract is okay too. If you’re not sure, remember that before/after work and during your breaks are always good times to talk union.

**Can I wear my ONA pins during bargaining?**

Yes! Wearing an ONA pin, button, or nametag holder is a great way to show your support for our bargaining team. When hospital administration sees us wearing ONA gear, they know we’re united and that we’re watching their behavior at the table. Want some gear for your unit? Contact Christine Hauck at Hauck@OregonRN.org.

Have a question you don’t see the answer to? Want to observe bargaining or get some ONA gear? Contact ONA labor relations representative Christine Hauck at Hauck@OregonRN.org.