

Contract Negotiations Background: St. Joseph's Medical Center, Tacoma
November 2, 2021

On November 3, 2021, registered nurses (RNs) and our community allies will begin informational picketing outside St. Joseph's Medical Center (St. Joe's) in Tacoma. WSNA-represented RNs at St. Joe's have been engaged in contract negotiations with management for two months. To date, the parties have held ten negotiating sessions, most recently on Tuesday, November 2, 2021. There are approximately 1,175 RNs at St. Joe's.

Key issues at the bargaining table

Safe staffing

- Safe staffing saves lives and leads to better outcomes for all patients
- WSNA is asking the hospital to commit to minimum staffing standards and to take the steps necessary to ensure existing staffing plans are followed
- St. Joe's is chronically understaffed, creating unnecessary risk for patients and nurses and adding additional strain to nurses already exhausted after nearly two years on the front lines of the pandemic
- Since the first quarter of 2020, complaints about unsafe staffing have increased by 600%, and incidents where unsafe staffing posed a serious threat to the health and safety of a patient increased by the same volume
- Because St. Joe's has refused to treat nurses with dignity, the hospital has a significant turnover problem. Today, more than 25% of the nurses have less than 2 years' experience
- The situation is so bad that even nurses enrolled in St. Joe's "nurse residency" program are departing before the end of their contracts, incurring up to \$5,000 penalties just to take another job
- To fill staffing gaps, St. Joe's has asked nurses to "float" to other specialties. For example, cath lab nurses have been asked to staff ICU shifts. "Floating" nurses without the proper training or experience to fill gaps in specialized departments puts patients in danger and creates significant risk for nurses' licenses
- St. Joe's is also asking for asking for volunteers to help with quasi-clinical duties, where lack of appropriate training can lead to serious consequences for patients
- On night shift, 70% of nurses have less than five years' experience and 54% have three years or less. WSNA has proposed increased night shift differential pay based on the nurses' wage and experience to ensure the hospital is staffed with experienced nurses at all times. Management has rejected our proposals

Recruiting and retaining qualified nurses

- To maintain a high level of care, St. Joe's must make real efforts to recruit and retain qualified nurses, but St. Joe's has rejected proposals that would bring the hospital to parity on pay and benefits
- Nurses at St. Joe's earn on average 5.8% below their peers at area hospitals
- While hospitals like Tacoma General are offering five-figure retention bonuses, signing bonuses and recruitment bonuses, St. Joe's has rejected WSNA's proposals for incentives that could help retain qualified nurses

- Other area hospitals have offered meaningful wage increases in addition to bonuses to recruit and retain nurses.
- According to a 2017 survey of hospitals, the cost of turnover (including recruiting, hiring, training and other costs) was up to \$51,700 per nurse. Turnover is costing St. Joe's millions it could instead be investing in keeping nurses on the job

Nurse safety at work

- Nurses are increasingly concerned for their safety coming to and from the hospital after multiple incidents of car break-ins and nurses being accosted on the street
- Our bargaining team has put forward common-sense proposals to ensure nurses are safe on their way to work, at work and when they leave. St. Joe's has ignored these solutions and turned a blind eye to nurse safety
- Solutions include opening the sky bridges to the parking lot 24/7 and additional parking garage security, especially 30 minutes before and after shift change

Recognizing Juneteenth

- Juneteenth has been designated a national and state holiday, but St. Joe's refuses to provide holiday pay or recognize the day
- St. Joe's is located in a predominantly Black neighborhood
- Leadership of St. Joe's parent company, CommonSpirit, has called for increased attention to racial justice, but refuse to recognize the holiday

Crying poor: the real story of St. Joe's finances

- St. Joe's is owned and operated by CommonSpirit, the third largest operator of hospitals in the US. In fiscal year 2021 CommonSpirit earned \$5.45 billion in profit, a 14.9% profit margin
- Despite CommonSpirit's enormous profits, St. Joe's has rejected nearly every proposal nurses have put forward—from staffing minimums to fair pay to safety measures to recognizing Juneteenth
- CommonSpirit received \$1.5 billion in COVID-19 relief grants from the federal government
- CHI has earned enough money in the fiscal year to increase its long-term investment in financial markets by over \$7 billion dollars, sinking massive investments into hedge funds, private equity holdings and emerging market debt
- While CommonSpirit is raking in cash and investing in financial firms, nurses at St. Joseph's are burning out, struggling to make ends meet, and risking their safety to serve their patients
- It is time for CommonSpirit to invest in nurses, invest in patient care and patient safety, and invest in the community we serve in Tacoma.

About WSNA

WSNA is the leading voice and advocate for nurses in Washington state, providing representation, education and resources that allow nurses to reach their full professional potential and focus on caring for patients. WSNA represents more than 17,000 registered nurses for collective bargaining who provide care in hospitals, clinics, schools and community and public health settings across the state.