

October 26, 2020

VIA USPS FIRST CLASS MAIL AND EMAIL

Sharon Royne
Senior Vice President of Human Resources
CHI-Franciscan St. Joseph Medical Center
1717 S. J St.
Tacoma, WA 98405

RE: COVID-19 Outbreak

Dear Ms. Royne,

The recent COVID-19 outbreak at St. Joseph Medical Center is distressing to all of us. Many of our members are frightened for their safety and the safety of their families, as well as their patients and community. It is troubling that we have been raising concerns about personal protective equipment, notification of exposure, and other safety issues for many months before this outbreak occurred. We wish there was more of a focus on listening to the dedicated health care workers serving on the front lines of this pandemic as you make decisions about safety policies and protocols. The seriousness of this outbreak may well have been limited had more workers and the union been fully notified in its earliest stages.

We continue to be alarmed by reports from workers at St. Joseph Medical Center that they do not feel safe in the workplace during this outbreak. We would like to outline for you the beginning steps of what we need for workers to be safe:

Rapid COVID testing results for all workers. We have heard that many patients received rapid COVID tests, with results reported within hours or one to two days, while workers are being told that their test results will not be reported for three to five days. Some workers have inappropriately been notified of their test results by their managers instead of by Employee Health. Health care workers are rightly concerned about their own health and their families', which has been put in jeopardy by this outbreak, as well as whether it is safe for them to be working with patients while waiting to learn their COVID status. We all know that this outbreak cannot be dealt with unless test results are returned in as short a timeframe as possible, so that smart decisions can be made about worker and patient safety and infection control. We expect these test result lag times to improve immediately.

8-hour written notification of any potential exposure, as outlined in our existing Memorandum of Agreement dated March 15. We are hearing from many, many workers concerned that they have not been notified of exposures at all, let alone in writing within 8 hours as outlined in our agreement. We remind you that the agreement has not been altered or amended by the presence of an outbreak and requires:

“The Employer will provide all nurses or healthcare workers who have been exposed, such as treating a patient who was not confirmed, but later is to have COVID-19 with written notice within eight (8) hours of known exposure. The written notice will include: the date of exposure, assessment of exposure risk and Employer decision on whether to permit the nurse or healthcare worker to work or placed on paid leave.”

As a reminder, your staff are experts on infection control, PPE, and what constitutes an exposure, and their assessments of their exposures and exposure risks should be taken extremely seriously.

Paid administrative leave after a COVID test until receiving results (whether symptomatic or asymptomatic) and during the full length of any quarantine. We have heard that workers are being required to work while waiting for test results. We have also heard from the staff that there is talk about workers being low censused because of this workplace exposure and outbreak, while being forced to use their own PTO for paid time. Anyone who is waiting for COVID test results or is in any form of quarantine or isolation after an exposure, potential exposure, or positive test result, regardless of whether or not they are symptomatic, should be placed on paid administrative leave for the full duration of their quarantine or their wait for results. Workers should not be punished for the hospital experiencing an outbreak, and no one should be forced to choose between working a shift without knowing if they could infect patients or going without pay. We insist that you implement policies for non-punitive employee leave that adhere to CDC return-to-work guidance and applicable law. No employee should be issued a Short Notice Occurrence for any necessary time quarantined or out of work during this outbreak.

Maintaining safe staffing levels during staff shortages. We are sure we can agree that safe staff-to-patient ratios are not optional, no matter what else is going on in the hospital. We are aware that many workers are quarantined and unable to work. We demand you provide the staffing necessary to provide safe patient care and, for hospitals, comply with the nurse staffing requirements in chapter 70.41 RCW.

Adequate PPE for all workers. We acknowledge the staff are reporting that they have experienced improvement in the supply and accessibility of PPE. We continue to monitor the development, implementation, and regularly evaluation of current PPE, projected PPE burn rates, and projected delivery of PPE supplies.

We expect you to update infection prevention policies and procedures as necessary to reflect current best practice guidelines for universal precautions issued by the CDC, DOH, and L&I, and implement such policies and procedures.

Equitable payment of the Covid Caregiver Award. We have previously communicated our emphatic disagreement with the Employer’s decision to exclude many frontline caregivers from receiving the Covid Caregiver Award. The outbreak this month is a direct case in point of why this exclusion is divisive and angering to our members. The very same week that hundreds of caregivers across St. Joe’s received a \$1000 Covid Caregiver Award, workers on the 7th floor were directly exposed to a COVID outbreak—and yet had been excluded from the award because management did not consider the 7th floor to be a “COVID floor.” Now these same staff, in addition to being in a

situation that compromised their own health and safety, may have to suffer economically while being off from work due to the ramifications of this outbreak. We urge management to negotiate with our unions about the Covid Caregiver Award as well as the Broad Based Award, as we believe you are legally required to do and have gone to the National Labor Relations Board to enforce. Recognizing all of our members with the Covid Caregiver Award while they are facing a once-in-a-century pandemic would certainly help with staff retention and recruitment, which would mean safer staffing and better patient care.

We look forward to working with you to achieve all these goals as soon as possible. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Christine Watts

Christine Watts, MN, RN, CLNC
Senior Labor Advisor
Washington State Nurses Association
(206) 575-7979, ext. 3016
cwatts@wsna.org

Barbara Friesen

Barbara Friesen, MS, BSN, RN
Nurse Representative
Washington State Nurses Association
206-575-7979 x3056
bfriesen@wsna.org

Dian Davis

Dian Davis, RN
Local Unit Co-Chair

Allie Jones

Allie Jones, RN
Local Unit Co-Chair

Sally Budack

Sally Budack, RN-BC
Local Unit Secretary

Janet Stewart

Janet Stewart, RN
Local Unit Treasurer and Grievance Officer

Linda Burbank

Linda Burbank, RN
Local Unit Grievance Officer

Matthew McGuire

Matthew McGuire, RN
Local Unit Grievance Officer

Liberty Bolante

Liberty Bolante, RN
Local Unit Membership Officer

Melissa Garcia

Melissa Garcia, RN
Local Unit Membership Officer