

WSNA's Response to Tacoma General's May 17 Communication to Nurses

WSNA's responses are provided inline in red



May 17, 2016

Anita Wolfe, Linda Dean, and I wish to provide you updates on the status of WSNA contract negotiations. This will be the first of several letters, each focusing on a specific subject being discussed at the bargaining table. The intent of our updates is to reduce confusion or misinformation. Our commitment throughout the negotiations process is to provide information in an open, honest, and transparent manner. The focus of today's letter is staffing.

Let me begin by assuring you that your leadership team unequivocally supports safe staffing. On every schedule, in every committee, and on every unit, we plan and budget for safe staffing. We staff at levels appropriate to expected patient census and acuity. ***In response to WSNA's question on May 2 regarding how TG decides daily staffing levels, Anita Wolfe stated "TG staffs to 80% of patient census using patient census figures for last year." How does this 80% formula assure safe patient staffing for 100% of patients all of the time? How does this support safe staffing?*** Some might ask: "If the staffing plan is so solid, why does it feel like we're short staffed some days?" ***This is not a feeling - we ARE short staffed!*** Staffing is complicated. Each morning we face many unknowns: higher than expected patient volumes, ill calls, or unanticipated patient outcomes leading to higher levels of acuity. Sometimes even though we start the day with a fully staffed unit, unpredictable circumstances result in less than desired staffing levels. ***Here is what we know:***

- 1. If we used a plan to staff to 100% of our patients, that would be a start.***
- 2. Every business staffs for employee vacations and sick leave. There is no surprise that nurses need and will take vacation. There is no surprise that nurses will be sick. Unanticipated patient outcomes should not be a surprise – after all we are a hospital. Why is this so hard for TG?***
- 3. Over 750 Assignment Despite Objection forms were filled out at TG over the past 6 months. That is a lot!***
- 4. On January 18, Bill Greenheck stated in negotiations that "Tacoma General received over 11,000 applications from nurses last year". The nursing shortage at Tacoma General is not a result of fewer available nurses. Staffing is not a mystery.***

What we can control is creating appropriate budgets, posting positions when they become vacant, and doing everything we can to recruit and retain nurses. ***WSNA agrees! TG can create appropriate budgets, post positions timely, recruit nurses, and have a work environment that supports current nursing staff. These are all choices that TG has the ability to do correctly.*** Since arriving at Tacoma General, I have prioritized filling our opening positions and retaining and re-engaging the awesome nurses we have. ***Nurses at TG do not feel supported or respected. They are constantly being pressured to work on call, work overtime and on their days off, and are being***

denied all or part of their vacations. The persistent, unrelenting lack of adequate staffing is not the formula for engaging our awesome nurses.

Tacoma General and WSNA are discussing the issue of staffing at the bargaining table. Unfortunately, at the very time all of us should be developing reasonable solutions, WSNA has chosen to air very negative commercials – commercials that inject conflict where there should be collaboration. This action by WSNA is disappointing. ***RCW 70.41.420 mandates we collaborate on staffing issues. WSNA wants this collaborative process to work as intended under the law. Does TG? If they do, then why did TG move forward with a new care model in MS units without going through the staffing committee? This is a fact they acknowledged in a recent information request.***

Here are some of the many staffing proposals on the table at negotiations. You decide who is trying to solve problems in a productive, positive way.

Management Proposals	WSNA Proposals
<p>Removal of unbroken 15 minute rest period. Intermittent rest breaks = NO BREAK.</p> <p>You would get meal and rest breaks by doubling your patient loads and that of your colleagues.</p> <p>Management proposes language stating it is YOUR fault when you can't get a break and Hospital will not have to pay you for it when missed.</p> <p>More floating proposals. A three-tiered proposal for floating.</p> <p>Management wants to combine MORE clinical service areas where skills and abilities are NOT the same.</p> <p>Reduction in rest between shifts to 7 hours</p>	<p>WSNA has proposed evidence-proven nurse-to-patient staffing ratios to protect you and your patients from poor staffing by management.</p> <p>The Assignment Despite Objection (ADO) form should be institutionalized into the contract to encourage reporting of unsafe staffing and protect you and your patients.</p> <p>Healthy work-life balance is important. If management denies your PTO and you are close to your max, then additional time should be given so you don't lose any PTO through no fault of your own.</p> <p>Your time off is important for your health, your family, and your patients. WSNA proposed double time for all the time you work without proper rest between shifts.</p> <p>You should be able to call in and come into work late the next day if you work late and feel you need more rest. Nurses know when they need necessary rest before work.</p> <p>Language assuring adequate and necessary training prior to assuming preceptor or charge nurse duties.</p> <p>Enhanced committee language enlarging the scope, to include discussions regarding the support staff you need and vacancy posting issues.</p> <p>Language protecting nurses from standby and on-call if they haven't received necessary rest between shifts.</p> <p>48-hour Low Census maximum.</p> <p>Low census must be for duration of shift unless mutually agreed.</p> <p>Wage proposals to help TG in recruiting nurses.</p> <p>To make sure nurses get important time off, WSNA proposed a PTO incentive plan to encourage PTO use in non-prime times.</p>

We know we need to recruit new nurses who want to join us as we take care of our community. And that requires all of us to show up with a positive attitude and a commitment to tackle our challenges in a productive way. ***Nurses show up every single day with a commitment to care for their patients. However, feeling appreciated, safe staffing, approved vacations, healthy work-life balance, and a supportive work environment are the main ingredients to create positive employee engagement. Management demanding a smile does not.*** I will stand next to you when you have a need, and when things are challenging, I'll be there, too. My actions in my short time here demonstrate my willingness to follow through on this. ***Proposing contractual language that further burdens nurses and does not provide the relief they need is not showing support.***

On the back of this letter I have included the efforts we are committed to with the goal of recruiting, retaining, and engaging with employees on the issue of safe staffing. ***Again, on January 18, Bill Greenheck stated in negotiations that Tacoma General received over 11,000 applications from nurses last year. The nursing shortage at Tacoma General is NOT due to the number of available nurses. The staffing issues at Tacoma General can be solved based on allocation of resources and without further burdening the hardworking registered nurses.***

Your Negotiation Team and WSNA Staff are working to protect you, protect your license to practice, and to achieve better working conditions. Together, let's stop the decline and make Tacoma General great again!

Thank you for your continued service to our patients.



Julia Truman
Chief Operating Officer
Tacoma General Hospital

Operational Staffing Initiatives (not an exhaustive list):

- The creation of a Tacoma General specific float pool. Tacoma General has approved almost 20 new positions to create an internal nursing float pool to help cover sick calls or other unexpected absences. These brand new positions have been assigned to the Operations and Logistics Center. WSNA has rejected the proposals we have made at the bargaining table related to our new internal float pool. ***Sadly, TG's solutions always require nurses to do more. Now they want you to learn more clinical areas so that you can float more. Instead of hiring correctly and respecting knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with safe patient care in each clinical area, their answer is float, float, float. WSNA has counter proposed with language requiring adequate training, education, and orientation PRIOR to floating. We are considering their proposals in the context of all staffing proposals.***

- The creation of a MHS System-Wide float pool. MHS has created a pool of on-call nurses who float between all MHS facilities including Tacoma General. These nurses help fill in for medical leaves, vacations, vacancies, or other unexpected absences. WSNA has filed a grievance alleging that this float pool is inappropriate. ***TG must follow the law and bargain changes to working conditions - period. When changes are made and not properly negotiated, WSNA will seek redress under the law in order to protect you and your contract.***
- Approval of incentive pay for working extra shifts. Incentive pay for extra shifts worked has been approved on a unit to unit basis. Over 60% of the 750 nurses working at Tacoma General hold an FTE of 0.8 or less. ***Nurses want FTEs that fit the needs of their families and the needs of the employer. TG's solution to staffing: ask more from the nurses. WSNA always looks at incentive pay for nurses as your contract clearly illustrates.***

Human Potential Recruitment Initiatives (not an exhaustive list): ***The question here is recruitment to what goal: 80% or 100% staffing?***

- Held a very well attended nursing job fair in April 2016 showcasing job opportunities available in all major service lines across all facilities.
- Hired an additional experienced internal Nurse Recruiter in early 2016 who will add capacity to the existing team and who will be focused on filling RN vacancies.
- Continued focus on resident hires with the most recent cohort for the system set to start this month (May 2016) with a group of 75 new nurses. This is the total number of residents in the current class. MHS anticipates hiring and facilitating 4 residency classes every year.
- Expanded RN referral program with additional incentives for referring a nurse.
- An increased and active social media presence as well as a targeted and active search engine campaign.
- Continued emphasis on recruiting current daily agency and/or travel RN staff.
- Approval to hire a College Recruitment Specialist with an emphasis on critical needs including RN vacancies.
- Established partnership with two separate major recruitment firms to conduct national recruitment campaigns focused on RN vacancies.

Internal Engagement and Retention of Current Staff (not an exhaustive list): ***Nurses do not feel supported or respected. Until nurses receive adequate staffing, support staff, education, training, and decision-making input, words are just that – words. WSNA is doing everything possible to enhance internal engagement and retention. We need TG's help and cooperation.***

- An open invitation to engage and/or participate in any number of staffing related committees on both a hospital-wide basis and also on a unit to unit level. If anyone is interested please contact your manager.
- Town halls, forums, and other engagement events such as quarterly speakers focused on nursing topics.

- Continued market competitive pay and benefits. Fair and equitable step increases, workplace premiums, and incentives for extra shifts. Part time work available. Advancement and educational opportunities.
- A renewed focus on creating fun, positive, and engaging events as often as possible. Cooking contests, fun competitions, charity fund drives, themed work days, just to name a few!
- Leaders rounding on employees – everyday!

We're committed to making Tacoma General one of the best places to work, and we're working hard to ensure safe staffing. This is a team effort. Thank you for your work and caring on behalf of our community.