

Negotiations UPDATE

Wages and Staffing Remain Primary Topics at Negotiations

The hospitals and union continue to discuss wages and staffing.

Wages

Wages continue to be a primary topic at this critical juncture in negotiations, and the parties are exploring possible paths to find common ground. Several of the wage proposals exchanged so far involve the addition of or adjustments to wage scales at the three hospitals. Wage scales are often helpful for recruitment and retention efforts, but they are more complex and time-consuming to negotiate than a gross wage increase (GWI). While the dialogue continues, it takes the parties more time to draft and formalize their wage proposals due to the complexities.

Staffing

The other day, the hospitals shared with the union our existing staffing grids, which the union acknowledged were close to or in line in most cases with their desired minimum staffing ratios. The union commented that there is insufficient staffing to consistently meet the grids. We recognize that having a fully staffed team is imperative for our nurses and other healthcare associates to be successful.

Ratios will not solve staffing challenges, which are compounded by a lack of qualified candidates, extended unemployment benefits, unexpected call-outs and no-shows, and extensive state-mandated leave policies. We need flexibility to staff our hospitals based on patients' needs and care complexity, our staffing skill mix, predetermined hours per patient day, and anticipated patient volumes – not rigid, fixed ratios.

Locally and nationally, the nursing workforce has been challenged over the past 18 months by the COVID pandemic in ways we never could have imagined. As a result, the nursing profession is experiencing unprecedented turnover without enough capacity in nursing education programs to fill the void. Early retirements, nurses moving to travel assignments, and a migration away from acute care are just a few of the effects.

One of the ways we proposed addressing staffing challenges was with our proposed Retention & Recruitment proposal. It was designed to help fill RN, NA, and ITA vacancies and retain night shift staff. Our proposal included offering competitive payment incentives to FT and PT associates after orientation and at 12, 18, 24, and 36 months of service in the Med/Surg and Critical Care Float Pools, including new hires and current associates who sign a Recruitment & Retention Agreement. The union rejected this proposal without providing a counterproposal or alternative to resolve this staffing issue. The initiative has been successfully implemented at Sisters of Charity Hospital and, so far, we have added 18 new registered nurses and generated interest among others.

Gov. Hochul Announces Comprehensive Plan to Address Preventable Health Care Staffing Shortage

Today, Gov. Hochul presented a comprehensive plan to include preparation of a State of Emergency Declaration to address staffing shortages across the state's hospitals and other healthcare facilities. The plan, which was announced ahead of Monday's vaccination deadline, is intended to help increase workforce supply. Qualified healthcare professionals licensed in other states or countries, recent graduates, and retired and formerly practicing healthcare professionals would be allowed to practice in New York State.

Additionally, the NYS Department of Labor issued guidance to clarify that workers who are terminated because of refusal to be vaccinated are not eligible for unemployment benefits absent a valid doctor-approved request for medical accommodation. Governor Hochul commented, "I commend all of the healthcare workers who have stepped up to get themselves vaccinated, and I urge all remaining healthcare workers who are unvaccinated to do so now so they can continue providing care."

The executive director of the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA), a labor union representing 42,000 frontline nurses, praised Gov. Hochul's announcement. "We need adequate staffing to protect our patients and our colleagues, and we want to do everything we can to avoid returning to crisis levels during the pandemic."¹

Mercy Hospital Associates' Rights

Associates have the legal right to tell CWA how they feel if they don't want to go on strike and prefer that CWA settles negotiations with Catholic Health hospitals without a strike. Associates can share their views with CWA Local 1133 leadership at (716) 828-1133.

Because it's important to have the facts regarding bargaining, we will share regular *Negotiations Updates* with you. You may visit www.chsbuffalo.org/negotiations at any time for the latest news and information related to bargaining and to review copies of these updates and other FAQs.

¹ "In Preparation for Monday Vaccination Deadline, Governor Hochul Releases Comprehensive Plan to Address Preventable Health Care Staffing Shortage." 25 Sept. 2021. <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/preparation-monday-vaccination-deadline-governor-hochul-releases-comprehensive-plan-address>.