



Oregon Nurses Association
Bargaining Unit Newsletter

Providence Milwaukie Hospital (PMIL) Newsletter for Nurses



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ONA / Providence
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ONA Demands to Bargain over New Influenza Policy at Providence

As you may be aware, Providence's newly revised influenza policy posts that employees who have declined the flu vaccine will be required to wear a mask in all patient care areas when the Oregon Department of Health and Providence Infection Preventionists identify that influenza-like illness is prevalent in the area. Free vaccines and masks are available to all caregivers through clinics and roving carts.

While we believe the vaccination of nurses and other health care personnel has been shown to reduce influenza infection and absenteeism, prevent mortality in their patients, and result in financial savings to sponsoring health institutions, we also believe that masking policies may be a violation of an employee's right to medical privacy under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

ONA made a demand to bargain over Providence's announced policy. The result of ONA's demand to bargain is that Providence is prohibited from requiring registered nurses who do not get vaccinated to wear a mask until ONA and Providence have completed their negotiations.

We anticipate negotiations will take some time.

ONA requested that Providence consolidate these negotiations to one common table. Our thinking is that influenza season is upon us. If we want to get a sensible policy in place before we see flu cases in the hospital, we need to expedite bargaining. The best way to do that is one negotiation table with one agreement. Providence rejected our suggestion and is insisting on separate negotiations at all eight ONA facilities, a decision that inevitably will lead to delays and runs counter to its own stated desire to have a comprehensive influenza policy in place before influenza hits.

In the meantime, if you are one of those unvaccinated nurses and your manager orders you to put on a mask, **follow the order**. But then let your manager know that you believe the order is inappropriate until negotiations between ONA and Providence have concluded. Finally, inform your labor representative of your manager's order as soon as possible. ONA will be collecting this information and addressing if this problem arises.

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ONA also encourages all employees in hospitals and health care settings, as well as vendors and administrators, to get a flu vaccine to protect themselves and others against seasonal influenza, if they are able. If you do get vaccinated, you should request the quadrivalent influenza vaccine, which has a much higher efficacy than the trivalent. Unfortunately, it is our understanding that Providence is only offering the trivalent vaccine, a vaccine with only about 60 percent efficacy in healthy adults.

Some background on how we got here. Providence rushed to enact a new influenza policy, before considering that it needed to bargain with ONA over those changes. It publically announced its new policy as a *fait accompli* when in reality Providence is prohibited by law from enacting this policy unilaterally. Understandably, we are disappointed that Providence failed to come to ONA in a timely manner to collaboratively develop a common sense policy that will reduce the spread of infectious disease throughout the hospital prior to the beginning of flu season. It's not as if influenza is an unknown event. **It happens every year.**

The reason ONA made a demand to bargain is because ONA advocates for an evidence-based approach to address the spread of infectious disease in the workplace. As the recent spate of news coverage regarding the two nurses in Texas that contracted Ebola demonstrates, effective prevention needs to be part of a comprehensive set of actions and proven techniques.

These would include educational outreach, regular hand-washing protocols, respiratory hygiene and cough practices, donning and doffing procedures, appropriate staff training and staffing levels, as well as support for health care workers remaining home if they are ill.

For influenza, while vaccination is a key method of protection against and prevention of the spread of the flu, vaccine effectiveness can vary widely from year-to-year, as new strains of the flu virus emerge. As a result, immunizations alone are not the answer.

Nor is the answer requiring asymptomatic nurses that did not get vaccinated to wear masks, because there is no clear evidence that wearing a mask while caring for patients prevents spreading the flu. Instead, from ONA's perspective, the inclusion of masking stems possibly from a desire to shame and stigmatize those unimmunized employees.

That's unfair, especially when you consider that some of those nurses are medically unable to get vaccinated.

We want to hear from you.

Please take the survey and share your thoughts.

Click [Here](#) or go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/5YNY9VD>

We'd be especially interested to hear from those nurses that are medically unable to get vaccinated on the impact wearing a mask will have on their ability to provide patient care.

Please Take ONA's Ebola Preparedness Survey, if You Have Not Already Taken It

Unfortunately, we now know there are two nurses in Texas who are infected with Ebola. Because it is always possible that there will be a case or cases of Ebola in Oregon, our focus needs to be on implementing evolving procedures to prevent this virus from spreading.

We expect that the current and evolving Center for Disease Control (CDC) guidelines <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/> will be fully implemented, and that nurses in every facility will be actively involved in developing and implementing procedures.

ONA believes that nurses, other health care professionals and their employers **can protect** patients, the public and other health care workers. We are asking our members to step forward as they have done in previous public health

scares such as SARS, HIV and polio and lead the health care world in the management of this virus.

We are asking you to take a confidential survey so that we hear your particular concerns and interests. Your responses will not be individually identified in any way, but may be used to speak on behalf of ONA and nurses around the state.

If you haven't done so already, please take this ten question survey at your earliest opportunity. **It is extremely important that we hear from YOU.**

ONA will use this information to actively work on behalf of our members. click [Here](#) or go to <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/TBDYTXF>