Benton County Update – June 14, 2021

Thank you to the nurses who have attended a bargaining session. We know it is difficult to find time in the afternoon, but the employer notices the backing we have from our members. We truly appreciate those who have signed our petition and provided a personal statement of support. If you haven’t done either yet, please reach out to our team to do so.

In taking stock of bargaining so far this round, we have some significant accomplishments due to your outpouring of support. Remember, you can follow our work by reviewing all bargaining documents, including a bargaining tracker that shows proposals still on the table and tentative agreements (TAs are contractual language on which both sides agree).

Our biggest achievement in this bargaining round is that the employer has moved away from the “pay for performance” system. Your voices moved the employer to a standard step wage scale.

While they didn’t accept our 15-step proposal which matched regional hospitals, the employer counter proposed an 11-step wage scale based on annual progression. This scale is similar to the one we had before moving to pay for performance several years ago. The other two Benton County unions have only six-step wage scales. Under the employer’s counter proposal, each nurse would move to the step above their current wage on July 1. The gaps between steps are a healthy 3.41%, which is similar to other ONA-represented hospitals in our region.

However, seven nurses will immediately be placed at Step 11 (the top step) and another four will be at Step 11 within a year. Under this proposal, more than half of our members will not receive any more step increases, but only across the board pay increases beginning July 1, 2022.

In other bargaining successes, the employer agreed to:

• Pay $40 per month for the short-term disability premium.
• A three-month extension once per year to use PTO.
• Improved professional development.
• A new personal leave bank of 64 hours annually (although we counter proposed 104 hours).
• Our proposal to allow new hires a 30-minute orientation to ONA, which will help us onboard new members.
• New language to pay three nurses to serve as our bargaining team (up from the current two allowed in our contract).
On Tuesday, June 8, we offered a package counter proposal on open financial provisions. A package is different than individual proposals because the other side must either accept or reject the entire package. If they reject (as we did to their financial package from May 18), each of the constituent parts remain on the table.

Our package strengthened the wage scale by proposing three additional steps with a three-year wait and 3.41% gap. We also proposed 3% annual increases on July 1, 2021 and July 1, 2022 for all nurses. We retained our proposal for the County to contribute 1.5% to a deferred compensation plan (retirement program).

We countered their proposal on Leadwork. We proposed that those positions must be filled by following Article 13.7. The most senior applicant is awarded the position, unless another applicant is better qualified.

We offered a supposal to address unreasonable workload assignments among many of our nurses. We want to empower nurses to discuss workload assignments with their supervisor and to change the culture about working overtime. The employer suggested we use our own labor management cooperation committee via a side letter to develop this process. We are preparing a revised supposal that includes their suggestions.

At the end of the day, the employer offered “deal breakers” for them, in their words:

1) “Longevity pay” like additional steps at the top, which reward loyalty—not performance—they said.

2) The County will not allocate federal “American Rescue Plan” pandemic funds to workers, e.g., like the pandemic bonus we proposed. They told us those funds are being allocated to “programs.”

3) The County does not view hospitals as appropriate comparators, instead looking to other counties and small clinics.

We have strenuously argued that we are losing new hires to the Samaritan system. Moreover, potential applicants avoid applying for County positions once they compare County wages with the hospitals. Indeed, we told them, most nurses draw a 45-minute circle around their home and apply to employers within that region.

Membership Meeting – Thursday, June 17

We will hold a membership meeting from 5:30 - 6:30 p.m. on June 17. All are encouraged to attend.

Join Gary’s Zoom meetings in one of these ways:

1) Any device’s browser
   https://zoom.us/j/2810307587?pwd=czBLMnBV0VMxKzJFVVWh0b1ZSY1U3UT09

2) Download the Zoom app to any device
   Meeting ID: 281 030 7587
   Passcode: 6BjRSn

3) Dial on any phone 253-215-8782
   Meeting ID: 281 030 7587
Attend Bargaining on Tuesday, June 22
1:00 – 5:00 p.m.

If it looks like we’ll settle the contract, we may go longer into the evening.

We use the employer’s GoToMeeting account for bargaining. When we caucus (meet separately) we use Gary’s Zoom room (see information above).

Point your browser here from any device: https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/752356877
Use any phone and call (224) 501-3412, Access Code: 752-356-877

For more information, please contact any team member (Angela Edwards, Niki Kelley, or Terry Deeds) or our labor rep, Gary Aguiar, text/call 503-444-0690 or Aguiar@OregonRN.org.