A majority of Benton County nurses met with county executives to ask them to reinstate the third year of the Pay for Performance (PFP) pay increases. Of the 17 nurses in our bargaining unit, nine attended the August 28 meeting. Each attendee verbalized their support for the request in a polite and professional manner. The county executives listened intently to each nurse without interrupting.

Our effort was organized by our co-chairs Robin Baker and Angela Edwards, supported by Cindy D’Angiolillo. These three leaders ensured that every nurse was included in our joint actions to bring this matter to the county’s attention.

The trio collected signatures from 82 percent of our bargaining unit (14 of the 17 Benton County nurses) on a petition asking the county to restore the promised pay increases. We read the petition to the county executives and gave them the original (see the petition text on page two of this newsletter).

“Nurses began working collaboratively with county administration in 2013 to comply with administration’s request to implement pay for performance,” Cindy summarized the issue’s history to the executives.

“No other represented employees agreed to do so, but Benton County nurses, in following with our longstanding history of collegiality and community service, did. There were long delays in implementation, resulting in financial losses to long-time nurses who went without raises during that period, and ultimately gave up any retroactive pay to make them whole,” Cindy continued.

Our co-chair Angela stated our request succinctly, “We want the performance pay increases previously promised in the third year, ‘April 2019 and Beyond,’ of the originally approved plan.”
The county executives recognized our solidarity on this issue. We asked them to give us a decision by September 11. County executives initially declined to commit to this timeframe.

The county administrator said it would be impossible to meet that deadline because his calendar is typically full two to three weeks out. Since nine nurses demonstrated the issue’s importance, we asked him to prioritize the issue.

Again, he declined to move things around on his calendar to address this issue promptly. We continued to press them and they reluctantly agreed that human resources (HR) will report on their progress to our ONA labor representative by September 6. We notified administration that when HR reports out, we will insist on another deadline for the county’s next step to fix this issue.

At the meeting several nurses detailed how our nurses benefit the community. “We nurses provide a very valuable service that reduces suffering and helps medically underserved people live better lives,” said nurse Terry Deeds. “At least several million dollars in annual medical expenses are saved by our nurses, who prevent many costly illnesses, including emergency room and urgent care visits, as well as expensive hospital admissions.”

Many nurses reported it felt unfair to work towards their annual goals and then have the compensation system changed at the last minute. Cindy provided the background, “This year’s agreed-upon pay increase was abruptly and substantially reduced by an administrative action in May 2019, just as many of our nurses were coming due for their performance evaluations. Nurses worked all year on the agreed-upon goals only to have the corresponding promised pay increase drastically reduced.”

Ann Walker added, “It feels very unfair to do the work and then be evaluated and compensated under a new system implementation.” Corrections nurse Niki Kelley agreed, “A model should not be put into practice until we have had the opportunity to earn what was offered in the current model.”

Angela, our co-chair, described nurses’ feelings, “We feel it is unfair to change the policy and compensation before the completion of the original three-year PFP system. It is unacceptable and unfair that this change was made just prior to me completing my evaluation.”

Cindy concluded, “I personally achieved goals and a performance rating that should result in a 5 percent base rate increase plus a 5 percent incentive payment. A consolation increase of 3 or 4 percent is insufficient.”

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A leader is a person you will follow to a place you wouldn’t go by yourself.

- Joel A. Barker

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