Dear Colleagues:

We, the nurses at Columbia Memorial Hospital, are writing to inform you of a scheduled public action on August 20th that may impact your practice as a provider in the greater Astoria community.

As you may be aware, nurses at Columbia Memorial Hospital, represented by the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA), have been unable to reach agreement on the terms of our contract with the hospital administration. Since we started negotiations in April of this year, we have repeatedly rejected proposals from the administration which would harm recruitment and retention of nurses, and negatively impact patient care.

- Safe Staffing: There is no reason for the administration to refuse to include safe staffing language in our contract. They already are required to follow these under the law, so they should follow these in our contract as well.
- Economic Stability: The administration’s proposals ignore common-sense guidelines that would provide basic levels of economic stability, so nurses would have paychecks they can count on. For example, during our last mediation session management refused a proposal that would provide consistent schedules for part-time nurses who work 8 and 10 hours shifts. Their scheduled hours can fluctuate between 40 and 70 hours per two-week pay period, making it impossible to recruit or retain nurses. Fluctuating up to 30 hours per pay period is far beyond normal standards for nursing.
- Fairness in Decision Making: The administration wants to take away our voice in shift lengths by refusing to recognize nurses’ need for predictable work life balance. We need improvements in the current process for changing shifts lengths. The situation in the last six months in surgical services has made this more apparent than ever.
- Education: We need proper support for educational conferences and substantial tuition reimbursement that allows nurses to seek BSNs, as is the standard at all Oregon hospitals. We thought we had reached agreement on this, but management has threatened to go back on this.
- Healthcare: Our nurses, along with all staff, need lower premiums for our children. At our last mediation session, we agreed to tie this to any improvements provided to other CMH employees. However, management has also threatened to go back on this compromise.

Settling for an agreement that undermines these core issues will make it difficult to retain and recruit high-quality, professional staff. Nearly every major department at Columbia Memorial are under-staffed, pushing stress levels to an all-time high. We believe excellent patient care needs to be at the foundation of our partnership with the hospital. Without a fair contract in place that will recruit and retain nurses, the administration is choosing not to prioritize how that affects our patients.

It is unacceptable that the administration would refuse to reach a fair agreement, while they collected a 12 percent operating margin in 2018 alone. The administration reported that they were keeping this money to build a new hospital, which we support building, but there are far more responsible ways to secure funding. We had the fifth highest operating margin in the state, but the fifth lowest wages for
nurses among comparable institutions. Meanwhile the hospital awarded its CEO an $88,000 bonus and country club membership, bringing his total compensation for 2017 up 22 percent to $645,000. This shows that they are not interested in making investments in nurses, staff and providers or significantly decreasing patient costs.

At this point, we have little alternative but to appeal directly to the public to help us continue to provide the care our patients deserve. It is not our intent to disrupt your practice; you should, however, be informed of the reasons we are taking public action, so that you can respond to patient inquiries.

It was our sincere hope to use our federally mediated negotiations on August 14th to reach an agreement. However, this effort failed, so we plan to go forward with public action, on August 20th, and will be joined by staff from SEIU. As required by law, our bargaining unit and SEIU have both sent legal notices to the hospital administration.

We want to express our gratitude to the many physicians and other colleagues who have been supportive of our efforts to achieve a contract while avoiding a public dispute. We know we are stronger together sharing a common mission with physicians to stand up for our patients and recruit and retain the staff necessary to provide the high-quality care they deserve.

We would appreciate your ongoing support as we continue to advocate for a contract that maintains a vibrant, independent medical community at Columbia Memorial Hospital, ensures the retention and recruitment of high-quality nurses, and continues to offer the best patient care in our community.

Please contact the CMH CEO, Eric Thorsen at 503-338-7505 and at ethorsen@columbiamemorial.org and ask that he direct the management bargaining team to reach a fair agreement immediately.

Sincerely,

The ONA Negotiating Team

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