COVID Protections Needed

Nurses from the Grande Ronde Hospital ONA executive team met with representatives of the hospital, Chief Nursing Officer Laurie Marcum, Assistant Chief Nursing Officer Nate Wadsworth, and HR Director Steve Lyon, last week to discuss COVID-19 related issues and challenges our coworkers are facing trying to navigate the rules around exposures and quarantine. At that meeting we discussed concerns about COVID leave benefits and pointed out that other hospitals in Eastern Oregon have different, we believe better, benefits. This is not the first time we have asked the hospital to review its policy regarding COVID leave. Specifically, we have asked about the potential to establish a COVID sick bank (other hospitals’ staff receive up to 80 hours of COVID leave) or to relax the restriction on accessing extended illness hours (EIH) to remove the 24-hour waiting period. These are benefits available to other nurses in Eastern Oregon. The hospital does try to compare themselves to single, stand-alone hospitals, yet other independent hospitals have provided additional leave coverage.

During our meeting, we also noted that there are apparent inconsistencies in administration of COVID-related quarantines. We are aware of a few examples and brought those forward (see stories shared below). The hospital expressed concern about potential inconsistencies while also stating that each situation is investigated privately, assuring us that they would look into each of these situations as soon as possible.

We are aware that guidelines may (and have) change over time. Our concern is that the guidelines employee health is using to decide if or for how long to quarantine are not clear nor available for all to review. We have asked the hospital to update the intranet with the most recent guidelines and to send notice to staff when these guidelines change.

Have you been quarantined or refused work due to a COVID exposure, flu-like or other signs/symptoms of illness, or have a family member who has been exposed/tested COVID positive? Please let us know!

We want to know YOUR story. If you have been asked to stay home, please send an email detailing your experience to Salemi@OregonRN.org. Include as much detail as you can, including dates of exposure, location (work, community, home?), how long you were asked to quarantine, did you have a COVID test, etc.

Below are the stories we shared with the hospital and they are currently investigating:

- Nurse one was part of the RN team performing COVID tests on suspected COVID patients, performing multiple tests daily. The nurse...
COVID Protections Needed  
(continued from page 1)

began to have symptoms and they were asked to quarantine for 14 days. The nurse was required to use their own EL/EIH for those 14 days as GRH stated there was not a direct link to a workplace exposure, therefore they did not have to pay the COVID admin pay. Nurse one was in a high-risk environment even though proper PPE was being worn. We believe that this should have been considered a workplace exposure.

- Nurse two had an exposure to a COVID positive co-worker while at work. The nurse was asked to quarantine for 10 days and was told that they would be able to return to work with a negative COVID test. However, after the COVID test was negative, the nurse was still quarantined for the full 10 days and initially required to use their own EL/EIH. This situation was investigated afterONA executive team members raised concerns, and the hospital has determined that this was a workplace exposure and has returned the nurse’s personal leave time.

- Nurse three had an exposure at home via an immediate family member being COVID positive. Even though the COVID positive member isolated from the rest of the family, the nurse was asked to quarantine 14 days after family member’s 10-day quarantine, which totaled a 24-day quarantine. The information provided to this nurse changed several times, and even after the nurse tested COVID negative, they are only being allowed back to work 14 days after their last exposure.

These are just three of what we believe may be many COVID exposures among our members. Please reach out and share your story, so we can better understand how our members are being impacted.

Workers are Entitled to File Worker’s Compensation Claims for COVID

Workers who have been quarantined or isolated due to a workplace exposure or have contracted COVID-19 in the workplace may be entitled to have their lost wages and medical expenses covered by their employer’s workers’ compensation insurance.

- Workers should tell their employer about any job-related injury or exposure as soon as possible.
- Employers must provide a workers’ compensation claim filing form (Form 801), if requested. Workers may also file a workers’ compensation claim through a medical provider.
- Employers may not prevent a worker from reporting or filing a claim for any on-the-job injury, exposure, or illness.
- Employers cannot retaliate or discriminate against a worker for filing a workers’ compensation claim or for raising workplace safety concerns.

If you are a healthcare worker, you are more likely to contract COVID than the general public. If you contract COVID and are unsure of where you did so, please consider filing a Worker’s Compensation claim.

We believe that multiple nurses have already been impacted in a similar way and with COVID rates increasing throughout our county and the state, more nurses will face this situation. To learn more, click here or go to: https://bit.ly/WCD-Oregon-COVID

Weingarten Rights:

Employees have a right to a union representative during investigatory interviews or questioning when the employee has a reasonable belief that discipline or other adverse employment consequences may result from what he or she says.

An employee may not be retaliated against for this request.

HIPAA

Remember, HIPAA rules regarding access of your or your family’s medical records are subject to employer policy.

At GRH, employees are not allowed to access their or their family members records themselves. If you have a need to see these records, please follow employer policy.