Washington County
Health Department Nurses

Tentative Agreement Reached with Recommendation to Ratify Contract

Negotiation Team
Co-Chair: Ivette Torres
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Ballots due August 10, 2011

We held two bargaining unit meetings, the first on June 15 and the second on June 22. We asked for feedback on how to proceed with the County given the package of proposals it was making. What we heard back from the nurses who attended those meetings, and others who contacted us individually, is that while no one liked the take-aways proposed, most understood that we are in unique economic times that necessitated some changes.

At these meetings, we also discussed having the County open Voluntary Employees Beneficiary Association (VEBA) accounts for each nurse and divert a portion of the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) increase to fund the VEBA. The idea was that the VEBA account could be used to pay the premiums nurses are responsible for in 2012. The interest in the VEBA was to offset the expenses due to the cost sharing.

On July 25, we met with the County and reached a tentative agreement. This includes the cost sharing for health insurance beginning in 2012 where nurses will be responsible for 5 percent of the health-insurance premium and eliminating the minimum on the annual COLA (the minimum is currently 2.5 percent). Their proposals will result in a 1.43 percent raise this year, and increased out-of-pocket costs for health insurance in July 2012.

However, we did not agree to the VEBA. Late in bargaining, we received clarification from the County’s benefit expert that the VEBA could not be used to pay for the premiums. The reason is that the 5 percent cost sharing will already be taken out pre-tax. So to use the VEBA in addition would be “double dipping” under IRS rules and not permitted. As a result, nurses would actually be better off getting the entire COLA increase, rather than diverting a portion of that increase into a

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This tentative agreement is not ideal. However, we feel the agreement represents the economic realities facing the County. In addition, looking at other public employers, the raise increase that we are receiving over the duration of this contract will likely be on the high end. For example, the State is proposing mandatory unpaid furlough days, step freezes and no COLA increases.

A Ballot is enclosed with this newsletter. Ballots are due in the ONA office no later than August 10, 2011. The Board of Commissioners will then vote on ratifying our agreement on August 16 which will allow nurses to receive the 1.43 percent COLA increase on August 20, 2011.

Below is a summary of all of the changes we agreed to. If you want to review the actual tentative agreement, go to ONA’s website at www.OregonRn.org, click on Bargaining Units under the Union menu, and select Washington County Health Dept to access a copy of the Tentative Agreement.

**Article 8.2.4**
Agreed that nurses could not receive holiday pay if they are in an unpaid status on the workday immediately preceding or the workday immediately following a holiday. This is the policy that currently applies to all other County employees.

**Article 17.1**
Agreed to the County’s health insurance proposal. Effective plan year 2012, the County will pick-up 5 percent. Insurance rates will be based on tiered rates, rather than a composite. This will mean that individuals, employees plus one, and families will pay different amounts. There is also a reopener in case premiums increase by 10 percent or more over the preceding year.

**Article 17.2 and 17.6**
The County will provide fully paid life insurance coverage for each employee and dependents with a policy value of at least $10,000. The County will also allow each retired employee the opportunity to remain in the life insurance program.

**Article 17.7**
Employees in job-share arrangement will pay insurance premiums in accordance with County policy.

**Article 21.7**
The County will now provide 30 days notice in an event of a layoff rather than the current 15 days. If this happens, it will provide us more time to figure out different options to hopefully avoid a layoff.

**Article 29**
Three year agreement expiring June 30, 2014.

**Appendix A**
COLA increase based on CPI-W (Consumer Price Index, West) with an agreement to get rid of the floor. Maximum rate remains at 4.5 percent. This year nurses will receive a 1.43 percent increase.

**LOA on Conference for NP Admin Time**
Delete as it is no longer applicable.