On October 16, McKenzie-Willamette Medical Center proposed an increase in our healthcare insurance premiums by five percent for 2020. Under our current contract, nurses received a 2.25% wage increase in January 2019 and are scheduled for a 2.25% increase in the first paycheck in January 2020. Our initial analysis suggests a five percent increase would equal $6 to $8 monthly increase in premiums for most nurses. (See their letter here and our response here.)

How do we compare to others? In the last ten years, health costs incurred by families covered by large U.S. employers increased an average of 6.7% annually. Nationwide, recent studies project large employers’ healthcare costs to increase 5 to 6.5% in 2020.

*Who should bear the costs of rising healthcare costs? Large employers or their workers?*

At McKenzie-Willamette Medical Center, we have generated tremendous profits for Quorum Health Corp (QHC) shareholders. In the last five years, our combined efforts have created more than a quarter-billion dollars in profits. Moreover, we were the most profitable hospital in the QHC system last year, and we remained the most profitable major hospital in Oregon for each of the last six years.

*Is it fair to ask nurses and other workers to accept low wage increases and higher healthcare costs?*

In our contract, we don’t directly bargain health benefits with the employer. Instead, our employer annually notifies of us of their proposed changes to the insurance plans for health care, life, and disability (as well as retirement programs).

We can then “meet and discuss” their proposed changes. If we cannot move them to change the proposed changes, we have a unique reopener option.

Within thirty days of the initial notice of the plan change, we may notify them we are terminating our contract with them. By terminating our contract, we are—in effect—opening a new round of bargaining. The entire contract is reopened where proposals on anything is legitimate, including wages, strengthening UPCs, requiring break nurses, limits on mandatory call, excessive call, and shift cancellation.

Earlier this summer, QHC proposed to SEIU workers at MWMC that their healthcare insurance premiums should increase by more than 20%. However, at the final agreement on their contract, SEIU successfully capped annual increases at 5%.

*We want to hear from you? What should nurses do?*