ONA Response To COVID-19

The Multnomah County (MCHD)/Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) executive committee is working hard to negotiate a memorandum of understanding (MOA) with the county that clarifies our rights during this pandemic.

So far, we have gotten the county to agree to several changes we believe will benefit ONA members during the pandemic response: a lifting of the vacation cap and a relaxing of the disciplinary policy if nurses call out sick due to flu-like symptoms.

We are also proposing that any nurse who is directed to self-quarantine by their personal health care provider is placed on Administrative Leave rather than being forced to use their own sick time. The county has responded by suggesting that nurses would be allowed to take a “loan” of up to 40 hours from their future sick leave and 40 hours of future vacation leave, all of which the nurse would be required to pay back within five months.

During this time, the nurse would not have sick leave available. This is not acceptable. Anyone who has flu-like symptoms or who has had a confirmed exposure to COVID-19 and is in the incubation period should not be coming into work.

We believe the county’s proposal will encourage people to come in while they are sick, which is why we are continuing to advocate that nurses should have additional leave time during this pandemic.

As a reminder, even though there have been emergencies declared at the national, state, and local levels, our contract is still in place as are your rights under the contract. With that said, there are provisions in our contract that allow for the county to adjust work schedules and locations without posting or notice in the event of an emergency. If your supervisor tells you that you are being mandated a change in location or position and you wish to object, first note your objection with your supervisor, then comply with your supervisor’s instruction and contact your ONA labor representative, Aaron Giesa (giesa@oregonrn.org).

Information about COVID-19

Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) is working hard to make sure that nurses and our patients are taken care of during this pandemic. To that end ONA has set up a resource page for our nurses at oregonrn.org/coronavirus. On it, you will find the most up-to-date information about the work our union is doing to keep nurses and patients safe, as well as resources and information related to COVID-19.
ONA and management will be meeting weekly to keep communication open and discuss updates, concerns, and changes concerning how the county is dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Please let us know of any question or concerns you would like us to bring forward to these meetings.

The following is a summary of the topics discussed at the Nurse Employment Relations Committee (NERC) meeting held on March 18, 2020:

**Availability of PPE:**
- Need to make PPE last due to continued national shortage. It will be difficult to secure more. Hand washing, social distancing emphasized.

**“Essential employees”:**
- According to HR, understanding on essential employees is that nurses are considered essential. They are providing front facing services to clients to continue operations in the clinic. Waiting for additional information, however, those who are not considered essential they are teleworking and for those who need assignments. Managers are looking at ways for them to continue working.

After you have determined that you are being asked to take an assignment you don’t feel is safe, raise that issue with the charge RN, then the supervisor, or manager.

Clarify what your concerns are, what the evidence supporting that concern is and then ask for the PPE that you think is needed.

If you are still being directed to accept the assignment, accept the assignment, then file an SRDF (or go to: www.OregonRN.org/115) and contact your labor representative or bargaining unit leader.

While we recognize that this current situation is fluid and rapidly evolving, the safety of our members is important and can’t just be sacrificed.

**Telework:**
- Management is exploring the possibility of expanding access to Epic to allow RNs and LPNs to perform work from home.

**Triage:**
- We raised the problems with triage logic not meeting patient needs for some clinics and patient populations, management assured us that they are working to address this issue.

**Weekly Communications**

This week, your local ONA officers and staff asked the county to agree to schedule weekly meetings to discuss the COVID-19 outbreak and the impact on your workplace, and the County has agreed to this request. We told them we wish to discuss supplies, PPE, staffing, and any other updates as necessary.

Forthcoming newsletters and communications will give updates from these meetings. If you have issues you want to see raised with human resources or operations at these weekly meetings, please contact an ONA executive committee member or your ONA labor representative.