I have been reading comments from management with questions regarding the length of time it is taking to arrive at a contract for our nurses at PPMC and thought it would help if I put something together that provided some perspective and clarity to where we started, where we are now, and where we hope to arrive.

Four years ago, before the SARS COVID-19 Pandemic, Providence, like many area hospital systems, pursued concessions at the bargaining table that eliminated healthcare workers earned illness time (EIT), which was used for serious illnesses like the flu, family leaves, and significant medical procedures. At the time, they made many promises about how short-term disability would work but these promises haven’t born out.

As healthcare workers were hailed as heroes during the early months of the pandemic and the warts of Providence’s short-term disability program became painfully apparent, we approached Providence, repeatedly, for some version of sick time to recognize the permanently changed landscape we were living in. Providence said no. Repeatedly.

When our nurses and other healthcare workers began leaving their jobs in droves, because of pay, benefits, the working environment, or because of burnout, trauma, and moral injury, we implored Providence to offer retention bonuses, to improve benefits, to provide sick leave, to do ANYTHING that would keep nurses at the bedside so we could do the work our patients and this community rely upon us to do. Providence decided that they would do nothing until our contract opened.

Your PPMC bargaining team of ONA Officers started meeting to prepare for bargaining in July of 2022. Since that day, we have met a total of 25 times – usually for a day at a time – to discuss, review, revise, plan and construct proposals or responses to the articles in our contract. In addition, we have met with PPMC nurse management 14 times to discuss and negotiate our contract. So as of today, your bargaining team has volunteered a total of 39 days of their own time with the goal of arriving at a contract that is fair, appropriate, and reasonable for the nurses of PPMC. Coordinating all our schedules can be challenging as we work different days and shifts. This can be exasperating when management typically does not provide their counter proposals until late in the day on those days when we are in negotiation.
Initially, there was some discussion of simply negotiating wages and then rolling the contract over for a year, delaying negotiations for the entire contract. After the initial survey carried out by ONA at PPMC, it left no doubt that PPMC nurses wanted to include the entire contract for negotiation. It was also very clear that there were several priority items that the team should be focusing on based upon the feedback we received from the survey. Specifically, those items were staffing, PTO and sick time, wages, and healthcare benefits with many comments regarding the loss of EIT and its replacement with a benefit that many considered to be sub-standard, overly confusing, laborious, and difficult to access with inconsistencies in administration.

When our contract re-opened, Providence insisted that we, seven nurses and our union representatives, draft and deliver every, last proposal before they would respond to a single one. On our days off, we spent hours deliberating and debating how to best meet our members’ needs and what we thought Providence might find reasonable or realistic. It took months to develop these proposals. The seven directors and managers on Providence’s negotiating team, along with their attorney, likely billing $500 or more an hour, waited, doing nothing to improve the situation of nurses and other healthcare workers.

The active survey confirms the priorities that were initially identified last year, remain the most important.

Between Nov. 10, 2022, and Jan. 17, 2023, we handed PPMC nurse management proposals for 19 articles, three appendices, two new articles, and two new Letters of Agreement (LOA). The majority of these were provided on Nov. 10 (8 total) and Dec. 13 (15 total). We added a new LOA on Feb. 10 regarding MLK Day.

We received the first responses from management on Jan. 17 (5 total), Feb. 10 (8 total), Feb. 21 (7 total), March 8 (4 total), and then one on March 28.

All of your priority items were proposed on either Nov. 10 or Dec. 13, and we received initial responses on Feb. 10, March 8, and March 28.

We have been told by management that there are nurses who are frustrated with the time it is taking to get to a contractual agreement and that we are not focusing on your priorities. We share that frustration as we have been working on this contract for 10 months, and as you can see, we waited three months before receiving responses to our initial articles. Our union is a democratic organization, and if there are a majority of nurses who feel that the priorities established and reaffirmed by our surveys are no longer valid, then make your union representative, union officers and union stewards aware of this and we can adjust. Our objective is to serve your best interests.
CNO Lori Green said she heard people are wearing their black ONA T-shirts to avoid bullying on their units. If you are being bullied on your unit, for wearing an ONA t-shirt or for any other reason, we ask that you let us know and we will do everything we can to put an end to it.

On the topic of wages, the ball is definitely in our court to respond to the most recent management proposal from April 4. To this point, we have been waiting for their responses to staffing, health benefits, PTO and sick time prior to responding as they are all interrelated and impact any wage proposal response.

We didn’t propose wages on May 2 because we have many other priorities where Providence has offered little or no movement. Providence has suggested that it’s extremely difficult to move on those things, and they may be unwilling to do so at all. We chose to focus on the areas where we are farthest apart so we can resolve them. Providence wants to dangle a carrot in front of us in hopes to peel off enough support to neutralize us.

Regarding the April 4 proposal:

- The PPMC proposal remains below the wage for St. Vincent’s that will go into effect on July 1, 2023 (and St. Vincent’s will soon negotiate their wage structure for 2024)
- The PPMC proposal only includes 2 steps for nurses in the Step 22 to Step 36 range.
- The PPMC proposal is below the wage proposal presented by OHSU management that is to go into effect July 1, 2023 (which is also likely to be increased). The initial comparison provided was with an OHSU wage from a year ago.
- The PPMC proposal had no retro pay.
- The current PPMC proposal for 2024 and 2025 are so low that they are likely going to result in a cost-of-living decrease.

There has also been reference by the management team regarding ONA discussing a strike. I want to be clear that our intention is to arrive at a contract that is fair for all the PPMC nursing community, and if it takes a strike to accomplish that goal, then so be it! Our intention with strike school is to provide accurate information regarding the different types of strikes and what that would mean to all who provide nursing care at PPMC.

The fact remains that while we were close to top of market for wages, time off, and health care 4-6 years ago, we are now at the bottom. As stated, our intention is to arrive at a fair and reasonable contract that brings us back to being competitive in the Portland and Oregon market. After being loyal to our hospital and community through the COVID years, it is only fair that we are now treated in a way that is respectful and appropriate.
Together as a united group of nurses, it is our belief that we can achieve what we deserve. Please support each other and support your union.

I hope this has clarified where we stand today regarding our contract and what we are trying to accomplish. Please do not hesitate to ask your Labor Representative (Seth Moore), or any of your Union Officers (Kim Martin, Christine Bernier, Kristin Harman, Molly Burtchaell, Jeanette Noah, Gabriel Wihtol, Colleen Butler, Karissa Lazar) if you have any questions.

Thank you all,

Richard Botterill
Chair, ONA/PPMC Bargaining Unit