10-day Notice & Mediation Summary

On Thursday, June 8 at approximately 4:30 p.m., a 10-day notice of intent to hold a limited duration 5-day strike was hand delivered and emailed to representatives of Providence Portland, Providence Seaside and Providence Home Health & Hospice management. This strike notification represents more than 1,800 Providence nurses and clinicians. The strike will be effective at 5:30 a.m. at PPMC. After 17 bargaining sessions over the past 8 months, the decision to strike followed an overwhelming yes vote by all three bargaining units on their recently completed strike authorization votes, and subsequently a joint negotiating period (including a mediator from the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Services) that lasted 19 hours from 08:00 a.m. Wednesday morning until 3:30 a.m. Thursday morning.

At the outset of the mediation, we let Providence and the mediator know that we needed to see swift progress on our major priorities to be able to reach an agreement that day. While we did, finally, see some incremental progress on our major priorities, it simply wasn’t enough. Providence’s initial proposal on PTO was less than one full day (one-time, and not every year of the agreement) that wouldn’t even cover the new MLK Holiday they agreed to. While they did finally move on Standby, their only movement on wages was a minimal increase to the Extra Shift Differential. We remained far apart well after midnight.

After countless hours of Providence wasting our time (and other ONA teams’ time) during negotiations the last few months, it became clear at 3:00 a.m. that we were still far from an agreement. We explored setting up bargaining dates on Thursday (Providence objected) and Friday (several critical members of the ONA team weren’t available), and it became apparent to us that we would need to provide 10-day notice to move forward in June. While we understood that Providence might refuse to negotiate following the 10-day period, their refusal is entirely arbitrary, and it constitutes an unfair labor practice (ULP). The best way for Providence to stabilize operations and ensure the highest quality care for patients is to reach an agreement with our 1,800 nurses and clinicians. If that’s what Providence really cares about, it should be an easy decision to meet us at the negotiating table. Nevertheless, on Friday, Providence cancelled our previously scheduled bargaining session for June 13, even with the knowledge that St. Charles and their nurses had reached an agreement just four days prior to the start of their scheduled strike.
Rumor Control

Since the strike announcement, many nurses have come to the ONA Bargaining Team members with concerns regarding rumors that have been circulating, and many have reported feeling threatened and scared by these rumors. I’m hoping that I can allay some of these fears and provide feedback on the rumors in this message, as well as provide an overview of what we are asking on your behalf.

First, you are not required to call in to notify your manager that you are striking and that you will not be coming in for your shifts the week of June 19. The 10-day notification suffices as the legal requirement for this notification. If your manager asks you about your intentions to strike or honor the picket line, please contact a member of the bargaining team.

We call on every ONA nurse to honor the picket line and not cross. We have set forth, as a group, to raise standards for all nurses and our profession, in the face of incredible opposition from Providence. Please support your coworkers, and please show Providence that we’re united. That said, the rumor that ONA will “fine” members that cross the picket line is simply not true. I repeat, no one will be fined for crossing the picket line, although we hope that you respect and support your co-workers.

Additionally, it is illegal to terminate workers for striking. Thousands of health care workers have gone on strike across the West Coast and consistently return to their position after a short duration—usually not more than a few days or weeks. Also, for a strike that is protesting ULPs, like this one, it is unlawful for an employer to permanently replace a nurse.

Finally, if we go on strike, it will be to make sure our patients have better patient care now and in the future. Participating in a strike does not constitute patient abandonment. By standing up for improved conditions, you are advocating for better care for your patients. As required by law, ONA has given the employer 10-days advance notice before a strike so that Providence can move patients to other facilities and cease admissions. Patients who would normally come to Providence may have to use other facilities. If a legitimate emergency (natural disaster, catastrophic event) arises, the emergency will be assessed, and appropriate decisions will be made.

If anyone has concerns about rumors, concerns about threats implied or otherwise, or simply fear of the ramifications of a strike, please contact one of your bargaining team members (myself, Kim Martin, Christine Bernier, Kristin Harman, Molly Burtchaell, Gabriel Wihtol, Jeanette Noah, Colleen Butler, and Kyle Cook) or your ONA Labor Representative (Seth Moore). These are also the same people you can contact if you have any questions regarding the contract, what we are bargaining for, and what kind of response we are receiving from Providence management.

There will be an accurate FAQ on strike questions and answers coming in the immediate future. Please watch your email for more information.

Moving Forward

Our four priorities have remained the same throughout negotiations and are all driven by the surveys that you completed to direct our efforts. They are as follows:

1. Competitive pay so Providence can recruit and retain the highest quality staff.
2. Staffing support so we can care for our patients and community in the way that everyone deserves to be cared for.

3. Additional Paid Time Off so we can take the time we need to care for ourselves and our families. Right now, a simple illness can cost us a week or more of vacation time, and

4. Healthcare benefits that are at least as good as the benefits most Providence Health Plans provide (our plan is worse than the ones many of our patients have).

Associated with the four top priorities are several details that include such items as increased extra shift differential; increased standby on-call differential; and defined flexibility for our per diem nurses. There are several other items that remain on the table that include improvements to clinical ladder maintainability; establishing step increases for our more experienced nurses in the higher step levels; increased PTO accruals to cover loss of sick time benefit; increased PPMC contributions to our STD and Paid Parental Leave benefits; improvements to outpatient mental health service; increased cost of living percentage in the second year of the contract; we continue to search for an appropriate response from PPMC for the EIT loss; and there are many more items we look forward to discussing with management once they return to the table.

During the past four years of our current contract, we have put our hearts and souls into our work as nurses, caring for our patients, each other, and our community. Patient acuity and census is higher than we have ever seen, and our jobs are more demanding than they have ever been. During the eight months of negotiations, we have been imploring Providence management (who were at home when we were on the front lines) to hear our concerns and equip us with what is needed to continue this difficult work.

Now is the time for Providence to put people over profits.

The bargaining team are hopeful that Providence will follow through on their stated desire to arrive at a fair contract and agree to continued negotiations and dialogue so that we may avoid the strike scheduled for June 19-23. Providence has stated that their offer after a strike will not be as “lucrative.” We do not buy this threat and we will not be bullied off our position. We need Providence to return to the table prepared to negotiate in good faith, to address the needs of our nurses, and to arrive at a tentative agreement that the majority can confirm ratification with a yes vote.

Finally, I know there are many who are concerned about potential financial hardships during the 5-day strike period. We expect that every nurse will receive a full paycheck as normal on June 23, and any missed time as a result of the strike will be reflected on the July 7 paycheck. We are assembling a Hardship Committee to evaluate hardship requests, and we have access to several pools of funds to provide support for striking workers. We will not be able to provide full pay replacement, but we will provide help to the greatest extent possible. If you are interested in serving on that committee, please let us know.

Thank you for all you do for our patients, for each other, and for our community. I know I speak for all the bargaining team and our labor representative when I say that it is an honor to serve you all.

Richard Botterill

Chairperson – PPMC ONA Nurses Executive Committee and Bargaining Team