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State Finds Hundreds of Staffing Violations at St. Charles Bend
Oregon Health Authority investigation debunks hospital’s “buddy system”, identifies widespread staffing failures

(BEND, Ore.) – The Oregon Health Authority (OHA) uncovered hundreds of staffing violations at St. Charles Bend during a months-long investigation this summer, according to a recent report by the OHA’s Office of Health Care and Quality Improvement. The investigation was initiated after nurses at St. Charles Bend—who are represented by the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA)—alerted the state to the hospital’s repeated violations of Oregon’s hospital nurse staffing law and its effects on patient care.

Nurses specifically cited St. Charles’ controversial use of the “buddy system” to provide patient care during mandatory staff breaks. St. Charles buddy system forces nurses to care for twice as many patients as the hospital’s staffing plan allows. For example, under St. Charles buddy system, a nurse can be forced to care for 10-12 patients at a time, despite the hospital’s staffing plan specifically prohibiting nurses from caring for more than 5-6 patients at a time. Research shows doubling the number of patients’ nurses are responsible for increases patients’ risk of infection and missed care and increases nurse injury and burnout.

“This level of systemic hospital violations is unprecedented. If nurses didn’t recognize and report a problem, patients would continue being forced to take unnecessary risks,” said emergency department nurse John Nangle, RN, CEN, chair of ONA’s St. Charles Bend bargaining unit and co-chair of the hospital’s nurse staffing committee. “I’m proud of nurses for standing together and speaking up to protect our patients’ health.”

OHA’s findings corroborated nurses’ reports that St. Charles Bend regularly failed to provide appropriate staff to care for patients during legally-mandated staff breaks. The investigation also found hundreds of additional hospital violations, including inadequate recordkeeping, misuse of mandatory overtime by hospital managers and hospital staffing plans that were unapproved, incomplete and lacked a foundation in national standards or input from staff nurses. Over the course of the state’s investigation, more than 200 nurses at St. Charles reported that the hospital-wide staffing plan did not meet their patients’ needs.

“This report proves once and for all that when hospitals ignore nurses’ input, patient care suffers,” said Nangle. “St. Charles needs to reevaluate every aspect of its operations and bring staffing and patient care up to Oregon’s standards. It’s not just the law, it’s also the right thing to do.”

St. Charles must submit a detailed plan to the state showing how it will correct its numerous staffing violations by September 29, 2017.

“St. Charles says patient safety is its top priority. That needs to be reflected in its corrections plan. The first step is pledging to work with ONA nurses who’ve proven they know how to recognize and respond to patient safety risks,” said Tammi Jo Virgil RN, BSN, a medical-surgical nurse and member of the
hospital’s nurse staffing committee. “Change is necessary to ensure safe patient care. Working together is the only way we can give patients the high-quality care they deserve and begin rebuilding the relationship between the hospital and health care providers.”

ONA represents more than 800 registered nurses at St. Charles Bend and more than 13,500 nurses throughout Oregon.

The Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) is Oregon’s largest nursing union and professional association. ONA’s mission is to advocate for nursing, quality health care, and healthy communities. For more information visit www.OregonRN.org

**Supporting Documents:**
View the full results of the state’s investigative report: [http://bit.ly/2wZ5GUs](http://bit.ly/2wZ5GUs)

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