COVID-19 MOU Update: 3 Weeks, 1 Meeting and No Response from Providence

Your ONA nurse representatives met with Providence management again on Thursday, Sept. 24 to continue negotiations on a COVID-19 agreement to protect nurses working during an unprecedented pandemic. The group had a good discussion about why nurses need a safety net that:

1. Provides prompt notification of COVID-19 exposures;
2. Ensures nurses have emergency COVID-19 leave if they are quarantined for work/non-work exposure, are awaiting testing results, or if they contract COVID-19; and

Despite Providence management having had three weeks to evaluate our bargaining team’s most recent proposal, Providence did not offer any official response or counterproposal at Thursday’s meeting.

We are hopeful Providence will respond at our bargaining session next week and agree on critical, long-term COVID-19 protections for nurses.

While Providence continues to “consider” our demands for critical COVID-19 protections, in less than one week more than 100 ONA nurses have shared their stories about how Providence’s mismanagement is affecting them. From its refusal to agree to extend critical COVID-19 safety protections, to its repeated cuts despite billions in profits, nurses are sharing exactly why we need REAL COVID-19 safety protections and why we need to feel safe and supported at work.

We’re asking you to share why it’s important to you personally to know you have COVID-19 safety protections and to feel supported on the job. Your voice is what will help us make movement and win key COVID-19 protections. SHARE YOUR STORY: https://actionnetwork.org/forms/protectpeople or find at: www.OregonRN.org/Providence

No COVID-19 Leave, Management Turns to PR Team

On the same day ONA nurses met with Providence management to try and reach an agreement on critical COVID-19 safety protections, Providence CNO Jennifer Burrows also met with Providence’s PR team to craft an email to all Providence nurses expressing her “commitment to open and honest conversations,” along with an ‘FAQ’ sheet full of inaccuracies and half-truths: from Providence’s refusal to extend critical COVID-19 protections for nurses, to its refusal to continue meeting with nurses systemwide, to telling us why nurses don’t need emergency COVID-19 leave, and informing us we shouldn’t be concerned when nurses and our other coworkers are low-censused, fired or have their pay cut, because we still have a job.

We agree with Jennifer on one thing: If there was ever a time for “open and honest conversation,” it’s during this pandemic. It’s time for Providence to listen to nurses.

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It’s time for Providence to agree to extend and expand critical COVID-19 safety protections for nurses and it’s time to actually support nurses and health care workers at work, not just say it. **It’s time for Providence to Protect People, Not Profits.**

“This fight for protections during the COVID-19 pandemic comes from the ONA nurses who want to see Providence’s mission in action. By responding to our Protect People, Not Profits campaign with a defense of current sick leave and COVID-19 exposure benefits, Providence begs the question, what good is the promise of a benefit if it is so difficult to access? Sedgwick denials to access our short-term disability and/or EIT constitute a profound hardship for ONA nurses who don’t want to work while sick. Does Providence’s promise—Know me, care for me, ease my way—not apply to ONA nurses?” – **Virginia Smith, RN at Providence Willamette Falls Medical Center, ONA bargaining unit president**

“ONA bargaining unit leaders have been working hard month after month to encourage Providence leadership to apply their mission and core values to their employees. Our working conditions have drastically changed with COVID-19 and we have adapted and continue to serve our patients and our communities. During this pandemic, Providence has gone weeks without speaking to ONA nurses about our COVID-19 priorities in negotiations.

They continue to tell us that what they provide is enough, even while nurses give regular feedback that benefits are inconsistent and difficult to access. If we get COVID-19 at work, we have to prove it but how?

If our vulnerable caregivers are advised by their physician to take a leave, they are denied access to their EARNED illness time. If a nurse does not have PTO and develops COVID-19 symptoms, they will go without pay while awaiting their test results. Providence has been "listening and talking" for six months, we are ready to see those values in action.

Other area health systems have stepped up to provide their caregivers with emergency paid time. Providence sees fit to let its nurses and caregivers hang in the balance, awaiting another potential surge. Are we not nursing in the same pandemic? Are we not taking the same risks, facing the same inadequate access to PPE? The stress of this pandemic is compounded by the clear demonstration that our employer values their bottom line more than frontline workers.” – **Alexis Keller, RN at Providence Milwaukie Hospital, ONA bargaining unit chair**

“We stand proudly with any and all members affected by the devastation COVID-19 has brought this year to frontline staff. You are battling personal health concerns, family health concerns, childcare and education dilemmas and the economic and social toll this disease has brought to our nation.

The initial MOU that was in place no longer exists. Plain and simple. We advocate for better protection, better notification and better support than what Providence is willing to provide. WE are all ONA. We call for unity amongst nurses throughout the Providence system and stand with those who are suffering right now. Insist that Providence apply their mission to their caregivers. Know me, care for me, ease my way.” – **Laura McBride, RN at Providence Newberg Medical Center and ONA bargaining unit leader**

“Since COVID-19 began in Oregon, we’ve seen only 0.7% of our Oregon caregivers who had work related or community exposure.” – From Providence FAQ Sheet

“If that’s the case, why not provide 40 hours up front before burning EIT and PTO? And why quibble over whether it is work or community acquired? The cost would be minimal, the benefit to morale and good faith immense, and a just gift to your frontline caregivers who have worked hard under stressful conditions for months!” – **Richard Botterill, RN at Providence Portland Medical Center and ONA bargaining unit chair**

“To support caregivers at the height of the crisis, special short-term benefits - including up to 80 hours of emergency time off,* expanded childcare subsidies, quarantine pay ... and other temporary benefits - were provided to all caregivers, including those who are represented by ONA.” – From Providence FAQ Sheet

*Only after burning all EIT and PTO

“The crisis is not over - with good chance of a second wave or at least a prolonged state of potential exposure and stress. Governor Brown recently extended Oregon’s state of emergency to November 3.

If Providence continues to work and operate under the state of emergency umbrella, why were the benefits to ONA and non-ONA healthcare providers only temporary? Surely they should also remain in place while our state remains in a state or emergency.” – **Richard Botterill, RN at Providence Portland Medical Center and ONA bargaining unit chair**
ONA bargaining unit leaders at Providence facilities across Oregon will soon lead short unity breaks to send Providence management a unified message: Protect People, Not Profits!

Last week, more than 100 ONA Providence nurses agreed to speak out about some of the heartbreaking impacts of COVID-19 and the need for a strong memorandum of understanding (MOU) that protects ONA nurses who work at Providence facilities; However, Providence management is still not getting the message.

After continuous delays and a lack of urgency from Providence management over critical protections for nurses during the COVID pandemic, the ONA Providence System Bargaining Team will move to organize “unity breaks” across Providence facilities.

Unity breaks can be an extremely effective tactic. Our fellow union nurses at the Washington State Nurses Association led unity breaks at multiple University of Washington hospitals this year to secure critical COVID-19 protections. Unity breaks are an important and popular way for health care workers to advocate for health, safety, and stability during this pandemic.

Unity breaks can take a lot of different forms: Nurses gathering together at a specific location and time to collectively share stories or information, walking together through a facility to pass out buttons, or coming together to do a photo montage! These breaks are a fun and energizing way to build solidarity while sending a message to management.

Unity breaks are a form of “concerted and protected activity,” and management may not retaliate or interfere with them. After a sea of Protect People, Not Profits buttons flooded Providence hospitals last month, it is clear that ONA RNs know that concerted activity of this nature is effective, powerful, and safe when we act together. Unity breaks are no different.

If you support ONA’s campaign for COVID-19 protections, please click this link to share your interest in planning, participating, and amplifying these planned unity breaks.

For additional questions, please contact your ONA bargaining unit chair or labor representative.

Be on the Lookout for Kronos Changes

Weeks ago, Providence announced it intended to make changes to the Kronos timekeeping process which would take effect near the end of September. We responded to this announcement immediately by nominating the nurse bargaining team at Providence Willamette Falls Medical Center (PWFMC) to meet with Providence management and negotiate potential changes, assess their impact on members and report back to an ONA leadership group composed of nurses from facilities across the state.

Through this process we’ve learned most of these changes should ultimately be beneficial to nurses, including stopping the “rounding system” which has historically disadvantaged workers, allowing more units to combine meals and breaks, clarifying that nurses should clock in before changing into work required scrubs to ensure donning and doffing is paid time, and ending discipline for increased incremental overtime.

However, changes to Kronos can be complicated and cumbersome. We will continue to monitor these changes’ impact on members. Please remember to check your timesheet and paycheck closely over the next few weeks as we evaluate these changes to ensure you are paid correctly for the hours you work.

If you notice any inconsistencies or have additional questions and concerns, please reach out to your bargaining unit leaders, union steward or labor representative as soon as possible.
You Have The Right to Wear ONA Buttons and Badge Backers

Nurses in several Providence facilities have reported managers are trying to prevent nurses from wearing ONA “badge buddies” and ONA buttons including your “Protect People Not Profits” buttons. To be clear, you have the right to wear ONA badges and buttons to support your colleagues, your union and to tell Providence to Protect People, Not Profits! Showing solidarity with your fellow nurses by wearing ONA badges and buttons is a long-standing practice for nurses throughout Providence. We stand by continued use.

If you are directed by a manager to remove a badge buddy or button, please comply with that directive and contact your steward or labor representative immediately. We will vigorously protect your free speech rights by legal action if necessary.

We hope this pushback is just a case of a few overzealous managers and that Providence is not starting an anti-union campaign in the middle of a pandemic. We have contacted Providence management to correct their misperception and will keep you updated. In the meantime wear your button and badge buddy proudly and share your story about why you need support and protection at work!

Join hundreds of nurses sharing their story here: https://actionnetwork.org/forms/protectpeople
Know Your Rights and How to Use Them: Sign Up for an ONA Steward Training

Learn how to build nurse power, motivate and mobilize your coworkers and defend your hard-earned rights on the job by joining an ONA steward training designed specifically for Providence nurses.

Stewards are essential to raising standards for nurses, workers and patients throughout the Providence system. This training gives you the tools to make a difference. ONA’s Providence-specific virtual steward trainings are the perfect basic training for new stewards, nurses interested in becoming a steward or any current steward looking to refresh your skills and knowledge.

Next Virtual Steward Trainings

Wednesday, Oct. 14, 9 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Thursday, Nov. 19, 10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
Sign up today: https://bit.ly/30afPKr

We’re Here for You: Wildfire Resources for Members

Oregon’s devastating wildfires have affected all of us. We’ve seen fires decimate homes and entire communities while forcing nurses and allied health workers to scramble to provide for our patients while ensuring the health and safety of our families, friends and neighbors.

In these unprecedented times ONA is working to support members through information sharing, mutual aid efforts, contract protection and new emergency dues relief and grants programs.

- ONA’s Board of Directors has voted to expand our successful COVID-19 dues relief program which supported members facing lost hours due to COVID-19. Emergency dues relief is now available for members facing a loss of hours due to Oregon’s wildfires.

- In addition, the board has stepped up to create a new emergency grants program to cover expenses associated with wildfire evacuations. Members who have been evacuated for 48 hours or more are eligible for grants of up to $500 to help support you and your family.

If you are experiencing financial hardships due to this disaster, we are here for you. Please contact us at MemberServices@OregonRN.org to learn more about and apply for our new emergency dues relief program OR emergency grants program and let us know what else we can do to support you.

We are also leading the way by providing an updated list of critical wildfire resources for nurses. ONA’s wildfire resource page serves as a clearinghouse of information so you can stay informed, locate local resources, ask for help and offer support for your colleagues and communities.
What are Your Weingarten Rights?

In the case National Labor Relations Board vs. J. Weingarten, Inc., the Supreme Court ruled an employee who reasonably believes an investigatory interview will result in discipline has the right to have a union representative present. This is legally protected activity under the National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) and is your fundamental right as part of an ONA bargaining unit.

All nurses in ONA bargaining units have the right to ONA representation during any investigatory interview that could lead to discipline. By invoking your Weingarten Rights, you ensure you have an advocate by your side during difficult conversations. Having an ONA steward or labor representative supporting you gives you a contract expert to advise you during any conversations with management that may lead to discipline.

While we hope you never need to exercise these rights, it’s important that we all know our rights in order to protect ourselves and our coworkers.

You Have a Right to Representation

Every nurse has discussions with supervisors about job performance. When this happens to you, there is an important question to ask your boss, “Could this meeting lead to discipline or affect my personal working conditions?”

If the answer is “Yes,” stop the meeting and invoke your Weingarten Rights by saying:

“If this discussion could in any way lead to my discipline or termination, or affect my personal working conditions, I request an association representative, steward or officer be present. Unless I have this representation I respectfully choose not to participate in this discussion.”

How to Use Your Weingarten Rights

Take immediate action when you are called into a meeting or discussion you believe may lead to discipline.

• Ask the supervisor or manager who is present, “Could this meeting lead to discipline or affect my personal working conditions?”
• If the answer is “Yes,” stop the meeting immediately.
• Invoke your Weingarten Rights by saying: “If this discussion could in any way lead to my discipline or termination, or affect my personal working conditions, I request an association representative, steward or officer be present. Unless I have this representation I respectfully choose not to participate in this discussion.”

• Contact your ONA steward or ONA labor representative immediately or call the ONA office at 503-293-0011.
• Wait for the ONA steward or labor representative to arrive or reschedule the meeting. Do not continue the meeting until your ONA steward or representative is present!

Every ONA nurse has the right to fair representation. If you have additional questions about your Weingarten Rights, contact your union steward or your labor representative.

Need help remembering your Weingarten Rights?

Request an ONA badge backer from your labor representative. ONA badge backers identify you as a registered nurse, fit most lanyards and contain the full Weingarten statement on the reverse side.