COVID-19 MOU Update: Nurses Say NO to Negative PTO

A message from Virginia Smith, RN, ONA Executive Committee President at Providence Willamette Falls Medical Center

Nurses throughout the Providence system have been tirelessly working to care for patients while ensuring their own safety. We continue to ask Providence for basic COVID-19 protections and Providence’s consistent answer is NO.

Because Providence said NO to systemwide bargaining, your elected nurse leaders appointed the ONA nurse bargaining team at Providence Willamette Falls Medical Center (PWFMC) in Oregon City to lead COVID-19 MOU renewal negotiations. The PWFMC team met again with Providence management on Oct. 1 with the same priorities nurses throughout Providence have identified from the start.

Nurses need:

1. Immediate notification of COVID-19 exposures;
2. Presumptive coverage for COVID-19 illness under workers’ compensation;
3. A safety net for nurses whose income is impacted due to COVID-19 or related illnesses
4. Economic support for nurses who experience long-term illnesses as a result of COVID-19
5. Emergency paid leave for COVID-19 from the time nurses report symptoms until short-term disability or other support kicks in.

These are basic protections. It’s obvious nurses should be notified and supported during COVID-19 and we shouldn’t have to use PTO while waiting for test results or Sedgwick claims processing.
Providence has disagreed with critical aspects of our proposal, saying NO to COVID emergency leave and instead proposing nurses “borrow” from our future PTO to fill any pay gaps between the time a nurse has COVID-19 symptoms and short-term disability or other support would kick in.

Forcing sick nurses to go into debt and work it off in the future is incomprehensible. This would be an additional burden to nurses who have already exhausted PTO and have to battle Sedgwick to get simple claims approved.

The PWFMC nurse bargaining team discussed this with elected ONA nurse leaders at all 10 Oregon Providence bargaining units and we all agree--NO to negative PTO.

Providence’s chief negotiator reported being “personally disappointed” nurses said NO to negative PTO and rejected Providence’s bad debt deal. In fact, Providence’s proposal is the real disappointment. Forcing nurses to choose between going into debt with their employer or working sick is wrong and risks coworker and community health as nurses impacted by the pandemic and wildfires struggle to pay their bills.

PWFMC nurses are the canary in the coal mine for the rest of the Providence system.

Despite ONA nurses asking Providence to approach COVID-19 protections systemwide to get support to nurses faster, Providence said NO. Despite nurses at PWFMC working side-by-side with ONA nurse leaders throughout the Providence system to tell Providence what we all need, Providence said NO.

Now we are saying NO to Providence’s proposals which offer nurses scant new protections systemwide and would leave us sick and in debt to our employer. Providence needs to Protect People Over Profits.

The PWFMC team will continue to work together with ONA elected nurse leaders from every Providence Oregon facility to hold Providence accountable and ensure nurses throughout Providence are safe and supported at work. Please support our collective efforts by sharing your stories, signing up for a Unity break and reaching out to your local nurse leadership to stay up-to-date and get involved as we fight for critical COVID-19 protections systemwide. Together, we can tell Providence to PROTECT PEOPLE NOT PROFITS.

• Click here to share your story

Contact your local bargaining unit leadership to learn about local Unity Breaks.
Coming Soon: Unity Breaks

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!

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.

Look for Unity Break information at your facility soon. Sign up, show up, and support your coworkers!

Please contact your ONA bargaining unit chair or labor representative for more information.

If you have any questions, please contact your ONA labor representative or visit the ONA Providence systemwide updates webpage here.

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