SHMC/ SHHCS Negotiations 2023  
Opening Statement  
Chris Rompala, OR, SHMC bargaining team co-chair.

It’s hard to believe that we are already sitting at the table again, starting our next bargaining session. Yet, it also seems like it was a lifetime ago that we were discussing our contract in this context.

Since our contract ratification we have had some great accomplishments benefitting nursing house wide. We have implemented meal and break nurses and have seen a marked decrease in missed meals and breaks; we established the Cultural Transformation Council, which led to the riverside chats to start addressing bullying and incivility in the workplace; we agreed on a new grad MOU, creating a more robust and supportive structure for our newest nurses; we have made great strides in strengthening the shared governance collaboration; and we have a reinvigorated workplace violence prevention committee.

The last four year have also been the hardest four years for so many of us sitting at this table, on both sides. It has been such a tremendously long, stressful, unsure, and challenging four years. We started off great, making positive changes to our work environment that were much needed, but then covid happened, and we were thrust into a world of uncertainty.

Yet our Nurses rose up and stuck it out.

As we sit at the table together as a team it’s hard not to notice the stark differences in the experiences we each had during the last four years.

I do wonder, were you also put into a situation where you felt you had to make a separate living space for yourself away from your family to keep them safe from the unknown? These nurses did. And they rose up and stuck it out. Were you afraid that
you were going to bring home a disease to your family that could potentially kill them? These nurses were. And in fact, Jennifer Fain brought home covid from work, ended up transferring it to her mother for whom she was the primary caretaker, which in turn lead to her death. And still, she continued to show up for work and stuck it out. Did you show up to work and care for patients that had a still unknown disease? These nurses did. And they rose up and stuck it out. Did you come down with Covid only to have the Covid PTO bank sunset and then be forced to use the remainder of your PTO, only to then return to the bedside to continue to provide patient care? These nurses did, and they rose up and stuck it out.

Oh wait, that’s right, many of you were able to work from home. Free from the constant changes that were occurring in our work environment. Free from the disease that we watched kill patient after patient. Free from the horrors of knowing the empty bed we see means yet another patient met their demise, and knowing another patient is going to quickly fill that bed only to have the same results.

I really appreciated how Heather reminded us all of a conversation we had in the wee hours on our last day of negotiating last time about our views on 8 and 12 hr shifts. We had actually come to a place where we could just sit with each other and talk it out. And it worked.

I had hopes our time together at the table this year would grant us the ability to work in a more collaborative manner, as we have over the last 4 years. Yet, just weeks before starting negotiations, we were told that a decision out of Vancouver was made to make our staffing plans based on PI, not by actual patient needs. Since then, management has tried to force changes in our units staffing plans in ways that violate the Nurse Staffing Law and our Contract.

In addition, during our first conversation with the director of labor relations for PeaceHealth, Mike had made a unilateral announcement about wanting to negotiate the
medical center and home care separately. When we shared with him all the reasons we had negotiated both contracts together for years, his response was “Well, sometimes change is hard to accept.” This was one of the most insulting things he could have said to a roomful of nurses who have been through what we have over the past four years.

We are also still trying to figure out how his motto of “No Margin, No Mission” aligns with the PeaceHealth mission of “We carry on the healing mission of Jesus Christ by promoting personal and community health, relieving pain and suffering, and treating each person in a loving and caring way.”

We will continue to look for the ability for us to work at this table to heal the trauma and move forward in a collaborative way. But, is this possible? We sure hope so. We are looking to regain the respect that we deserve through language regarding significant improvements in retention of our nurses with actual changes in our work environment that will naturally lead to increased recruitment. Perhaps PeaceHealth will conclude that it’s time to provide us the recognition for what we’ve gone through.

I ask that you reflect on the words you hear today and over the course of these negotiations, and consider how talking about “no margin, no mission”, your bottom line, and that “sometimes change is hard to accept” will be received by the nurses and other staff members here in this building, at UD, and out in the community who work hard every single day to fulfill the mission of PeaceHealth by providing high-quality care and heartfelt safe patient care every touch, every time.”

At this point, I’d like to take a moment of silence in recognition of those we have lost and what we have endured the last 4 years.