It’s Election Time!

According to our ONA/Samaritan Pacific Community Hospital (SPCH) bylaws, we must hold an election for all ONA offices in our bargaining unit. Current incumbents and others are invited to run for any of the seven seats available on our executive committee: Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Grievance Officer, Membership Chair, or Professional Nursing Care Committee Chair. These roles are described in our bylaws, which can be found on the ONA/SPCH website at www.OregonRN.org/89.

As we build workplace democracy at SPCH, a key feature is electing our own local leaders. Successful democracies require leaders who are willing to step forward and take responsibility. Please encourage your colleagues to consider running for one of these offices.

We will begin bargaining a full contract to the one-year rollover we ratified last month, which expires June 30, 2021. The negotiating committee consists of the executive officers we will elect this fall, and possibly other members they may appoint.

Candidates must self-nominate before Oct. 15, 2020 click here or go to: www.oregonrn.org/SPCH-Nominations

Our bylaws provide strict guidance on deadlines, including that the election must be held within three months after contract ratification (which was Aug. 19, 2020), a 14-day period to announce the candidates, and a 30-day nomination window. Here are the important dates:

- Oct. 15: Nomination of candidates closes
- Oct. 22: Announcement of candidate list
- Nov. 12 – 19: Election online

Since we recently ratified a one-year rollover contract with the employer, nurses will see a wage increase of 3 percent effective Aug. 31, 2020, which nurses will be reflected in their Sept. 21 paychecks. The wage table can be found in the 2020-21 ONA/SPCH contract extension at www.OregonRN.org/89.

Thanks again to our bargaining team for undertaking that work. We will begin bargaining a full contract in early 2021.
In two recent grants, SPCH has received a total of nearly $12 million in grants originating in federal funds. Oregon Health Authority reports that SPCH received $7.08 million under the Federal government’s Provider Relief Fund to hospitals and clinics. These funds are separate from the Payroll Protection Program, which require employers to continue to pay their employees. See page 3 of their report, click here or go to: http://bit.ly/Hospital-PRF-Allocations

These funds were provided to both wealthy and poor hospitals based on their previous years’ revenue. Recipients did not apply for the funds, which they received on May 15, 2020. Unlike the Payroll Protection Program, the hospital bailout (i.e., Provider Relief Fund) has almost no strings attached. Hospitals can stockpile the cash, use it to buy back their own stocks, or pay off debts. The only restriction reported by the New York Times is they cannot use it for executive compensation, but there is little accountability. Click here or go to: https://nyti.ms/2F3L5ms

More recently, another tranche of federal funds was provided to smaller and rural hospitals specifically for pandemic relief, according to Business Oregon, a state agency. SPCH received $4.64 million, which can only be used to cover necessary expenditures arising from the pandemic, include payroll and PPE, through the end of the year. Click here or go to: http://bit.ly/Oregon4Biz

Gary Aguiar, who was our primary labor rep last year, returns to represent nurses in our bargaining unit at SPCH. He’s already up and running and supporting our team as we prepare for a full bargaining round in early 2021.

Many nurses may remember Aguiar from before the pandemic, when he frequently rounded our facility. Unfortunately, the pandemic has severely limited on-campus visits by ONA field staff. For now, Aguiar will not visit patient care areas to avoid the risk of potentially being an asymptomatic viral carrier. As a non-essential worker, Aguiar has not stepped foot in a hospital since March 2. While he prefers to meet nurses face-to-face, he is available by phone, text, call, and Zoom.

Aguiar is a seasoned union leader with nearly six years of ONA experience. Prior to arriving at ONA, he was a professor of political science and a union activist for 11 years. He led the 1,200-member faculty labor union in South Dakota for four years through extensive bargaining.

Since arriving at ONA, Aguiar has supported ONA nurse leaders in successful campaigns at small and midsize bargaining unit throughout the state. In the last two years, four of the bargaining units he represents have received awards from ONA. He also represents nurses at Samaritan Albany General Hospital and other facilities in the Willamette Valley.

He has a small home office in Eugene, where he lives with his wife, Cecile. They love to travel, but the pandemic has forced them to quarantine at home.

Please welcome Gary to SPCH! Text/call him at 503-444-0690 or email at aguiar@oregonrn.org
Right to Speak

During the pandemic and at all times workers have a right to report concerns about health and safety to third parties, including regulators and media, without fear of unlawful reprisal or discipline. The pandemic crisis did not abrogate our first amendment rights to free speech, nor does it prevent us from reporting unsafe practices to any governmental agency. Federal law continues to protect employees from retaliation or retribution from speaking out.

We all value and honor the privacy rights of our patients. However, we know we cannot divulge any HIPAA personal information. We recognize our employer has a responsibility and duty to ensure patient information is not released inappropriately. We have an obligation, under certain circumstances, to speak up about unsafe patient care under the Nurse Practice Act.

Before doing so, we strongly urge nurses to discuss their concerns with our local leaders and our labor rep. Together, we can have conversations with the employer before we communicate with outsiders. Using our internal chain of command is a productive first step in addressing our concerns. We often find that many nurses share the same apprehensions and we have greater power when nurses speak with a single voice.

Pandemic or Unemployment Assistance

Lost Hours?

We are fighting to win key COVID-19 provisions for nurses at the bargaining table but we are also exploring new options to support you, including encouraging nurses to apply for unemployment benefits or pandemic unemployment assistance.

If you’re being low censused you may qualify for either benefit.

Unemployment Benefits

If you are losing hours and worked at least 500 hours last year OR earned more than $1,000 last year and worked throughout the year, you may be eligible for unemployment benefits.

For most nurses, if you were paid less than $648 in a week, you’re likely eligible. Note: Unemployment is not a substitute for paid leave. If you used paid leave to fill in for hours you would normally be working, unemployment benefits will not cover those hours.

Benefits range from $151/week to $648/week per person. Individuals are eligible to receive 1.25 percent of your yearly earnings per week.


Pandemic Unemployment Assistance

Even if you don’t qualify for regular unemployment benefits, people out of work due to COVID-19 are eligible for pandemic assistance.

Assistance ranges from $205/week to $648/week. You can receive 1.25 percent of your yearly earnings per week.

How Do I Apply? Apply for pandemic unemployment assistance click here, or go to:
https://govstatus.egov.com/PUA

Please note that this is not legal advice. This summary is based on our understanding of Employment Department rules. If you have a legal question, you should speak with an attorney. ONA members receive a free half-hour consultation with a local law firm as a member benefit.

Contact information is available at the ONA website.
www.oregonrn.org/485
Make Our Union Stronger by Becoming a Steward

Are you interested in learning more about representing your coworkers, problem-solving workplace issues, welcoming new members to their union, and building our union’s overall power to make improvements for nurses?

ONA stewards are the lifeblood of what makes our union strong. A strong union has at least one steward for every unit and shift. Stewards are there to answer colleagues’ questions and discuss concerns and help keep every nurse up to date on important union activities.

Register today to participate in a virtual steward training, Saturday, Sept. 26, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.

More steward training dates are being finalized for October and November.

Visit www.OregonRN.org to learn more.

Saturday, Sept. 26

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.

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 Gary Aguiar Aguiar@OregonRN.org.