Last week, Willamette Valley Medical Center’s (WVMC) Chief Financial Officer reported that the facility is behind budget for October. However, according to a recent profitability survey of sixty hospitals in Oregon and Southwest Washington, WVMC ranked better than most.

The report, which was published in the Portland Business Journal (Nov. 14, 2019), showed that WVMC had the 14th highest operating margin and 19th highest overall operating income of hospitals in our region. Of facilities that scored better, most are much larger, including OHSU and Sacred Heart Medical Center.

Because WVMC is selective about what (if any) financial data they share with their employees, we are unable to learn why or whether the facility is actually behind budget this year. However, according to the Portland Business Journal report, WVMC has a total operating income of $8.7 million, gross patient revenue of $390 million, and the 9th highest operating margin in the region.

What does this mean for nurses?
Being behind budget does not mean that WVMC is not profitable. It simply means they are not as profitable as they would like to be.

Nurses are not sales associates. We save lives and care for patients. Like all workers, we deserve fair wages, affordable health benefits, and safety in our workplace. That’s why we’re forming our union.

When we win our election, the employer will be required by law to bargain with us over wages, benefits, and working conditions. We will have a legal right to request information from the employer in preparation for the bargaining process, and if the employer claims that they can’t afford our proposals, they’ll be legally required to provide evidence of those claims.

Of the 29 hospitals in Oregon and SW Washington that are less profitable than WVMC, nurses who are represented by ONA have won increased wages and cost of living adjustments through contract negotiations. Because nurses in those hospitals have a union and a voice at work, they are likely to continue to see wage increases in coming years.

While WVMC may not have as much money as they wish they had, they do have money. Plenty of it. By forming our union and winning a seat at the negotiating table, we would like to help them prioritize quality patient care and nurse recruitment and retention.

Nurses at OHSU Support WVMC Nurses
“I’m Voting Yes”: A Unique Perspective and Encouragement from our Colleague

Many of us have seen Natalie Campbell working in GeroPsych over the past 7 years at WVMC. But what many of us may not know is that she has been a nurse for 35 years and is originally from Canada. Natalie also enjoys attending church and stays active with an annual triathlon with family and friends.

She became a nurse because she loves helping people achieve their optimum level of wellness. This is why she is currently working on her master’s degree. Moreover, it’s been a career which affords her a great schedule with good pay to support her life outside of work.

Having worked at 9 different facilities in Canada and the United States, Natalie has a unique perspective to offer us. Here at our hospital, Natalie finds the working conditions particularly challenging. This is in large part due to the for-profit status and high frequency turnover of hospital ownership. Tight staffing, poor equipment and antiquated technology make it challenging to provide excellent care for our patients. Management makes abrupt changes to pay practices and policies with unsettling results. In her experience, it’s different when nurses have a union and a voice.

When asked how she is voting on election day, here’s what Natalie had to say:

“I’m voting YES for ONA. I hope that other nurses join me in voting yes to create job stability, fair pay practices and transparency in management’s disciplinary practices.”

Nurse Solidarity: ONA at Sacred Heart Medical Center

Kevyn Paul has been a nurse for 22 years and works in the Emergency Department of the University District Campus at Sacred Heart Medical Center in Eugene. She’s also an ONA member leader. As one of two elected co-chairs of her ONA bargaining team at Sacred Heart, Kevyn and her fellow ONA team members recently helped bargain improvements to safety, staffing, scheduling, and working conditions for roughly 1375 nurses during the latest ONA contract negotiations. The resulting contract includes 12.5 percent cost-of-living increases over the life of the 4-year agreement. Click Here for the SHMC Bargaining Unit website or go to www.OregonRN.org/86

In addition to being active on the ONA bargaining team at Sacred Heart Medical Center, Kevyn is also the chair of ONA’s labor cabinet, a member-run committee that is responsible for all labor relations policies and activities of ONA.

Kevyn says she became a nurse because she loves helping people understand what’s going on with themselves and teaching them to help themselves. When she’s not at work or at the bargaining table, she’s spending time with her two grandchildren.

When asked what advice she has for WVMC nurses, Kevyn said:

“If you haven’t been in a union, you may not understand how much of a voice in your workplace you can have. You have a say in so much! Management also has a place and a say in the workplace, but if something just isn’t right, you can speak up and not worry about retaliation or disciplinary actions because you questioned the manager about some new process. When you are a part of ONA, you are safe in doing that. ONA is very strong and well-respected throughout the state. There’s a lot of support from ONA’s professional services and labor department.”