Meeting with WVMC Management

On Friday, March 27, our Oregon Nurses Association (ONA)-WVMC bargaining team met via conference call with Willamette Valley Medical Center (WVMC) management and their attorney to discuss the change in working conditions surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

We argued that this arising challenge warrants a discussion on how to address occupational exposure to COVID-19 and clear procedures for disruptions in healthcare.

Hospital management presented an overview of the things that are being done to keep workers safe and communicate with nurses. We presented the following key points:

- A communication plan that includes our ONA Executive Team members in the Daily Incident Command Center debriefs, in addition to a weekly touch base meeting with our CNO, Kirsten, to address issues as they arise.
- That nurses have the appropriate competencies (proper use of PPE, unit specific protocols, and safety provisions) before being assigned to a new unit.
- Nurses that had their hours reduced have an opportunity for cross training.
- Clarifying the need for PPE and that the Board of Nursing does not expect nurses to work without PPE.
- EIB should be available to nurses that meet the criteria for self-quarantine or contract COVID-19.
- That WVMC has an obligation to inform nurses that are exposed in a timely manner and also include a risk assessment and the date of exposure.
- Establish a bank of 120 hours of special use PTO related to the COVID-19 pandemic that would be available for a nurse personal use if they have to self-quarantine or contract COVID-19.

Management thanked us for our input and said they would provide a written response next week. We anxiously await management’s response and fully expect them to prioritize this work as our very lives may be on the line.

As more cases of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) are reported and confirmed, ONA will continue working relentlessly to do the work needed to keep nurses and our communities safe. Visit www.OregonRN.org/coronavirus to learn more.
Willamette Valley Medical Center (WVMC) Bargaining Update

Personal Protective Equipment

What should a nurse do when they feel their assignment is not safe due to not having appropriate or adequate personal protective equipment (PPE)?

♦ Nurses who are immunocompromised should notify their employers now, or as soon as possible, of the risks involved in caring for a patient with COVID-19, asking not to take care of these patients. If this request is refused, please document that refusal.

♦ If a nurse is asked to care for a patient with COVID-19 and does not believe that they have the PPE necessary to do so safely, then it is important to raise those concerns.

♦ First, make sure you are aware of what the current OHA guidelines for the type of patient they are asking you to care for (rule-out/positive/monitoring). If you have determined that you are being asked to take an assignment you don’t feel is safe, then raise that issue according to the following chain of escalation: charge nurse, then supervisor or manager. Clarify what your concerns are, what the evidence supporting that concern is and then ask for the PPE that you think is needed.

If you are still being directed to accept the assignment, accept the assignment, then file a Staffing Request and Documentation Form (SRDF) by visiting www.OregonRN.org/SRDF, and contact your labor representative or bargaining unit leader. While we recognize that this current situation is fluid and rapidly evolving, the safety of our members is important and cannot be sacrificed!

OSBN Position Statement: COVID-19

After hearing an outpouring of concern from ONA members, the Oregon State Board of Nursing released a revision of their position statement regarding practicing nurses, personal protective equipment and COVID-19:

“The global spread of COVID-19 (Novel Coronavirus) is a rapidly evolving situation. This event has also resulted in confusing and conflicting information regarding transmission, healthcare worker precautions, high-risk categorizations, etc.

Each medical facility/organization decides for itself and its personnel whether to follow Oregon Health Authority (OHA) recommendations or recommendations issued by the World Health Organization (WHO) or the Center for Disease Control (CDC). The Board of Nursing has no jurisdiction over individual employers.

The Oregon State Board of Nursing has received reports that nurses are refusing to accept patient assignments unless their hospital/facility follows WHO or CDC guidelines rather than OHA guidelines regarding personal protective equipment (PPE).

In the Governor’s declared State of Emergency authorization, OHA was tasked to provide the state response to COVID-19. Nurses cannot refuse an assignment solely because the employer is utilizing OHA guidelines rather than WHO or CDC guidelines.

All nurses and nursing assistants are entitled to keep themselves safe through appropriate use of PPE. The Board of Nursing does not expect nurses to work without PPE. The Nurse Practice Act will always support the ability of a nurse to refuse an assignment when they do not have the knowledge, skills, competencies, and abilities to safely accept it. Having PPE, or not having PPE, comes under the “abilities” section of the practice act.”

This statement is dated March 23, 2020.