



JNESO
DISTRICT COUNCIL 1, IUOE / AFL-CIO
the professional health care union

TEL: (732) 745-2776
FAX: (732) 828-6343
WEB: WWW.JNESO.ORG
MEMBERS: (800) 292-0542

1225 LIVINGSTON AVE., NORTH BRUNSWICK, NJ 08902

ELFRIEDA V. JOHNSON, RNC, PRESIDENT
DOUGLAS A. PLACA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

For Immediate Release

Contact: Stacey Ehling, 609-408-2461, stacey@princetonscgroup.com

COVID-19 Rages While LVH-Pocono Nurses Fight for Health & Safety Improvements in a New Contract

Pocono, PA/New Brunswick, NJ (Jan. 14, 2021) -- As COVID-19 cases continue to rise in the Stroudsburg area, Lehigh Valley-Pocono Hospital (LVH-P) nurses find themselves fighting two battles -- one to keep themselves and their patients safe and alive, and the other to get hospital administrators to agree to a new three-year contract.

On January 31, 2021 the contract will expire that covers some 400 Registered Nurses (RN's), represented by JNESO District Council 1, the professional health care union.

The biggest issues are creating Safe Staffing levels for optimal nurse to patient care ratios, to ensure that trained nurses are at the bedside, and to improve COVID-19 health and safety protocols and procedures including greater access to vital Personal Protective Equipment.

“Safe staffing has been an area of contention for years, not just at LVH-P but around the country,” stated Karen May, Director of Practice at JNESO. “Having the right nurse to patient ratio reduces mortality, improves the quality of care and increases satisfaction for the nurse and the patient. Our nurses want LVH-P to follow the proposed staffing levels called for under Federal Bill 2581.”

One problem that has worsened since the pandemic is that due to the shortage of nurses and support staff, many nurses have been pulled to all areas of the hospital. “We are fighting to make sure that the highest qualified nurse is at the bedside. You can’t just move a labor and delivery nurse to telemetry without making sure they are trained on the equipment and know the protocols for that unit, it can put patient lives at risk and the nurse’s license on the line,” said Annmarie Ruggiero, President of the JNESO local LVH-P. “We want to go where we are needed, but have to have the training to best care for our patients. There has been resistance by the hospital to provide pulling blocks to allow RN’s to remain within their competency.”

Making the workplace safer is also priority, and the nurses presented a comprehensive proposal that addresses a range of issues including: greater access to PPE; strategies to deal with nurses that have developed chronic symptoms caused by PPE use or having contracted the virus; best practices to reduce transmission and exposure for all staff; enhanced sanitization and more regular cleaning of rooms and equipment, and the ventilation systems.

JNESO District Council 1 is a professional healthcare union representing over 5,000 healthcare professionals in New Jersey and Pennsylvania and is an affiliate of the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE). Learn more at: www.jneso.org.



JNESO
DISTRICT COUNCIL 1, IUOE / AFL-CIO
the professional health care union

TEL: (732) 745-2776
FAX: (732) 828-6343
WEB: WWW.JNESO.ORG
MEMBERS: (800) 292-0542

1225 LIVINGSTON AVE., NORTH BRUNSWICK, NJ 08902

ELFRIEDA V. JOHNSON, RNC, PRESIDENT
DOUGLAS A. PLACA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“So far the hospital has pushed back in response to our plan,” said Kelly Bratcher RN, Vice President of the JNESO local LVH-P. “Administrators say they want to make things safer but we want a commitment to these and other items to make them more accountable for the health and safety of not just patients, but nurses, staff, and everyone who enters the hospital.”

She added, “Although the hospital has been good at providing PPE, we want to ensure that we don’t have to jump through hoops to get what we need when we need it, and we deserve to have the highest quality PPE (gloves, N95 masks, gowns, etc.) to protect our frontline workers!”

Other areas of contention for the negotiations include the lack of “Hazard Pay” for RN’s during the pandemic despite the fact that the hospital received \$9.9 million in COVID relief funding; the requirement for health care workers to prove they were “exposed” to the virus on-the-job in order to get workers compensation benefits; being forced to use accrued PTO and sick time when forced to quarantine if they are exposed; and, salary increases to effectively recruit and retain RN’s at the bedside.

Negotiations are underway but the lack of movement by the hospital towards an equitable contract is not looking promising.

“The bottom line is that our nurses put their lives on the line every single day with one goal -- SAFE PATIENT CARE. In return we need the health and safety of nurses to be a priority,” noted May. “The hospital needs to do more to make Safe Staffing a reality, provide the training, tools and PPE we need to do our jobs at the highest level possible, and to take greater measures to create a safer work environment to reduce the risk of spreading this virus.”

###

JNESO District Council 1 is a professional healthcare union representing over 5,000 healthcare professionals in New Jersey and Pennsylvania and is an affiliate of the International Union of Operating Engineers (IUOE). Learn more at: www.jneso.org.