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For Immediate Release

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Layoffs are a reality for some Virtua Nurses in the midst of contract negotiations

North Brunswick, N.J. – The threat of layoffs has been added to the list of concerns that nurses, represented by JNESO District Council 1, will need to address as part of contract negotiations with the Virtua Health Care System. The current 3-year contract covers 1,500 nurses in several South Jersey locations and expired on March 30, 2021.

“Without any warning or discussion, the hospital administration on the first day of negotiations informed us that they were eliminating 14 positions within the home care group. This is almost 14% of the 75 registered nurses who are in home care. Several of these jobs will be permanently lost, and while some new job titles are being created, the laid off nurses may not be eligible to take them,” stated Douglas Placa, Executive Director of JNESO. “The hospital administration’s behavior is egregious, with no respect for the nurses who may be losing their jobs and to those who might be indirectly impacted by the changes. We consider this conduct and the timing of these layoffs to be an attempt to intimidate the nursing staff.”

In addition to now fighting to protect the nurses whose jobs will be affected by these layoffs, JNESO is pushing for safe staffing ratios, more emphasis on patient acuity levels, and improved nurse and patient safety which includes greater access to resources and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) across the entire system.

Safe staffing ratios have been an issue for years. “The State has issued guidelines for ICU and Maternal Child Health, but that is not the case for all units – particularly for Emergency Rooms and Medical/Surgical units which can have fluctuating and heavy patient loads,” said Barbara Jones, an RN and staff nurse at Virtua who serves as the local president of JNESO at Virtua.

According to Jones, patient acuity must be part of the safe staffing equation, not just numbers. “Numbers don’t take into account patient acuity, which is how sick they are, underlying medical conditions, treatments needed, and how much assistance or care the patient needs. If the patient’s acuity is high, the ratio of nurse to patient needs to go down to ensure optimal patient care and safety,” she said.

Jones explained that overall patient acuity has been on the rise but has worsened since COVID-19. “We used to see a range of people, from those who could do self-care to those who needed complete care, but today patients coming in, whether for surgery or even labor and delivery, and require a much higher level of care. If they are in the hospital it is because they really need to be there.”

“Our nurses work extremely hard,” said Jones, “they need access to PPE when needed without having to go to other floors, and having an extra set of hands on the floor would mean a lot to a nurses who feel like they are drowning due to COVID and the increased patient care load,”

“We are coming to the table in good faith but dropping the layoff bomb at the start of negotiations shows a complete lack of respect for our nurses, and this isn’t the first time,” stated Placa. “This attempt to intimidate us will not be tolerated nor will it deter us. JNESO will continue to everything we can to fight for the rights and safety of our nurses and their patients.”

JNESO District Council 1 is a healthcare union representing more than 5,000 nurses and other health care workers in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. For more information, visit <http://www.jneso.org/>

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