



JNESO
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the professional health care union

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For Immediate Release

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Virtua Nurses Ratify New 3-Year Contract

North Brunswick, N.J. – Measures to ensure nurse and patient safety were key to the ratification of a new 3-year contract negotiated by members of JNESO District Council 1, the professional health care union, that protects and serves 1,500 nurses in the Virtual Health Care System.

The accessibility and use of Personal Protective Equipment was addressed in the new contract. “Previously rules and regulations on PPE were set by Virtua, but the stronger language states that anything governing PPE needs to meet or exceed state and federal laws and regulations, including guidelines from OSHA,” said Douglas Placa, Executive Director of JNESO. “It also states employees will be trained in the use of personal protective equipment, and fit tested as appropriate.”

Agreeing not to move nurses between different Virtua facilities was another victory for JNESO members. “This was a huge issue for our nurses and we are very proud of them for taking a stand and showing up in force to address this during negotiations,” said Barbara Jones, an RN and staff nurse at Virtua who serves as the local president of JNESO at Virtua. “The members were successful in demonstrating the negative impact of this practice to management and the need to keep nurses at their home hospital location rather than having them jump back and forth. Under the new contract the option is now voluntary, not mandatory, so nurses can’t be forced to shift hospital work locations.”

The elimination of 14 home care positions is still happening. “We couldn’t prevent it, but we are going to hold the hospital to the process and follow contractual obligations to the nurses who are being laid off or impacted,” explained Placa. “In addition, both parties agreed to create a committee to review the use of overtime, travel time between patients, scheduling and staffing and to possibly create some part-time positions to handle the additional on-call hours and alleviate some of the stresses that home care nurses face.”

Unfortunately, one of the biggest and ongoing issues -- safe staffing ratios – was not addressed in the new contract, but there has been progress. “JNESO and Virtua have agreed to have monthly meetings with representatives from both sides from various units at the hospital that are most impacted by staffing issues, such as med/surg and surgical units. This is a much more conducive venue for our members to have open discussions and hopefully get some resolution to staffing ratios and the resources needed to provide safe patient care,” explained Jones.

Under the new agreement full, part-time RN’s will receive a 2% increase pay across the board for each year of the contract, and per deim nurses will receive a 1.5% increase in the first year followed by an addition 1% in years two and three.

Another plus is that nurses can use 40 hours of PTO time under the criteria of the New Jersey Earned Sick Leave Act. “Before, if you had an unscheduled absence a nurse could be disciplined after 3 instances, now they can use 40 hours without the fear of being disciplined,” said Placa.

The new 3-year contract, which took effect May 1, 2021 will run through Feb. 28, 2024.

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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