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Nurses from Across the Philadelphia Region Hold Multiple Public Actions to Call Attention to Critical Staffing Concerns Inside Their Hospitals

Nurses at Temple University Hospital, Temple-Jeanes Hospital, Albert Einstein Medical Center and Pottstown Hospital to hold public actions to call attention to the patient care crisis in their hospitals, across our region and statewide.

Adopting a short-sighted and dangerous strategy, hospitals have tried for decades to save money by cutting nursing hours, endangering patients and forcing nurses out of hospitals and, in some cases, out of the profession. Even as the pandemic ravaged Philadelphia and adjacent communities and exacerbated this crisis, many hospitals have been slow to respond, nursing staff numbers and morale are, in some cases, at unprecedented lows and patient care is suffering.

“We’ve been sounding the alarm for years: There are not nearly enough nurses at the bedside,” said PASNAP President Maureen May, R.N. “What this means in ERs and on hospital floors in our area, throughout the state and even across the nation is that nurses, already physically and emotionally drained from a year and a half on the front lines of a pandemic, are being asked to care for more patients than is safe for either the patient or the nurse. When this happens--when nurses are routinely required to care for more patients than is safe--it’s called chronic nurse short-staffing, and care suffers.”

Today, nurses from across the Philadelphia region stood together to call attention to the staffing crisis inside their hospitals (see attached “Taking the Temperature on Staffing: PASNAP’s Fall 2021 Hospital Wellness Check,” a survey of staffing conditions inside 21 hospitals across the commonwealth as reported by PASNAP local unions there).

Nurses and allied health professionals have been on the front lines of the pandemic for 19 long months. They have repeatedly risked their own lives and those of their families in order to care for their communities. They want hospitals to do the right thing and take immediate action to fully staff their facilities, incentivize retention and treat both their patients and their nurses with the respect they deserve.

“Early in the pandemic, we had to fight to get ample PPE,” says Temple University Hospital Pharmacy Technology IT Support Specialist Carlos Aviles, president of Temple Allied Professionals. “Now we’re dealing with another crisis within the pandemic, and that crisis is staffing. We have the resources we need now, but we don’t have the staff. At one point in time,

as frontline healthcare workers, we were considered heroes. When did that time stop? When did we get forgotten?"

"We desperately need better staffing, better working conditions and a way to pull ourselves out of this crisis," says Temple University Hospital ICU nurse Mary Adamson, R.N., president of Temple University Hospital Nurses Association. "Nurses don't leave the bedside on a whim. We leave only when the conditions become too horrific to stay."

"The hospital is hiring but the nurses aren't staying--the workload is pushing them away," says Lori Domin, R.N., a Med-Surg nurse at Pottstown Hospital, where, in the last month alone, nurses have filed 37 short staffing forms from just three floors and the OR. That means that nurses from those areas have been forced to handle more patients than is safe for either nurse or patient due to the fact that there are too few nurses at the bedside (med/surg nurses, for instance, are being called on to care for eight to nine pre- and post-surgical patients at a time). At the same time, nurses are being given additional responsibilities due to inadequate staffing in other areas, such as in monitor techs and transport. "The truth is, short staffing quickly leads to nurse burnout and, as a result, to more short-staffing. It's a spiral." Domin is president of Pottstown Hospital Nurses United.

"Every day for many months, we have worked with fewer nurses than the staffing grids in our contract calls for," says Peg Lawson, R.N., a longtime Emergency Department nurse at Albert Einstein Medical Center, where, she says, management's unwillingness to create an environment that encourages retention of nurses has created an unsustainable situation inside the hospital and led to roughly 20 percent turnover of RNs just this year. "Fewer nurses mean less help for patients when they need it. It's deeply frustrating to know you aren't going to be able to accomplish the things that you want to or need to as a caregiver." Lawson is the co-president of Einstein Nurses United.

"Nurses are managing more patients with higher acuity than ever before at Temple-Jeanes," said Angie Cleghorn, R.N., president of Jeanes Nurses United. "We need our community and our legislators to understand that we need safe nurse-to-patient ratios if we are to continue to provide safe, excellent care. Right now, we just don't have the staff to do that."

Nurses across the commonwealth are following up this Day of Action by gathering in Harrisburg on Tuesday, September 28th, to urge their legislators to pass the Patient Safety Act, which would mandate nurse-to-patient ratios, based on patient acuity, in all PA hospitals.

COMING UP: On Thursday, September 30, the nurses at Crozer-Chester Medical Center, where management has allowed staffing levels to drop to unsafe and unprecedented levels and has treated the nurses with undisguised disrespect, are holding an informational picket and rally to call attention to the staffing crisis inside the hospital. The nurses want management to follow the existing staffing grids in their contract, guaranteeing a minimum level of nursing care for each patient and prioritizing patient safety.

