

Proposed Budget Reductions by Liz LaRosa, RNPA President

In April, RNPA became aware of the possibility of lay-offs of 19 coded RN positions in the Maternal Child Health Division at VMC. As a result, throughout the month of April, RNPA worked to identify exactly which codes would be eliminated and the impact on staffing and individual members.

In May, it became clear that Nursing Administration had arbitrarily identified positions for elimination when by practice positions recommended for deletions should have been delineated by seniority not by shift. As a result nurses that should not have been impacted received lay-off letters.

During the Board of Supervisors' Budget Hearings in mid-May, nurses from MICC, L&D, and members of the RNPA Board of Directors (BOD) attended the hearing. 25 nurses provided testimony to members of the BOS and the public regarding the impact these proposed deletions would have on patient safety as well as the delivery of care.

In addition, nurses from MICC and L&D, along with members of the RNPA BOD met with the County Executive, Dr. Jeff Smith, and shared our concerns regarding the data Nursing Administration provided to the Board of Supervisors justifying their recommended elimination of 19 coded nursing positions. The patient census data was incomplete, other data lacked meaningful acuity measurement, there was misuse of a staffing methodology (Frequency Distribution).

In addition, we discussed the practice and continued use of floats, per-diem and extra help Registered Nurses to meet core staffing on these units. Dr. Smith expressed his concern that these specialty units were being managed in this manner. When the current staffing matrix was shared with Dr. Smith, he had difficulty determining how the matrix accounted for patient acuity and how the number of RN's per shift was determined.

On May 30, 2010, RNPA prepared and distributed packets to members of BOS containing information relating to protecting patient safety and care as well as improving efficiency in L&D and MICC.

In addition, members of the RNPA BOD met with Rabia Chaudhry, Chief of Staff and Lara McCabe Health Policy Aide to Supervisor Cortese along with John Mills, Chief of Staff to Supervisor Ken Yeager. Furthermore, RNPA continued our ongoing dialogue with Supervisor Shirakawa.

RNPA's attempts to contact former RNPA President Pattie Christman, current Chief of Staff to Supervisor Kniss, were left unanswered. After concluding our meetings, the aides as well as members of the BOS seemed receptive and to understand the devastating impacts these cuts would have on patient safety and care. In sum, RNPA believed that all of the meetings were productive and that we would have enough votes to oppose the proposed deletions.

On June 14, 2010, members of the RNPA Board of Directors and approximately 20 nurses from L&D and MICC addressed members of the Board of Supervisors and the County Executive during the scheduled Budget Hearings and addressed the negative impact the elimination of 19 codes in the Maternal Child Health Division would have on patient safety and care.

Four members of the BOS, Liz Kniss (a registered nurse and co-chair of the Health and Hospital System), Ken Yeager (co-chair of the Health and Hospital System), Dave Cortese, and Don Gage voted to support the elimination of the 19 codes in the Maternal Child Health Division. Supervisor George Shirakawa was the only member of the BOS to oppose the measure and support patient safety as well as the nurses.

On June 18th, RNPA made a final trip to the budget workshops to speak out against the MCH cuts. Supervisor Cortese asked if the money could be found in the budget to postpone the cuts until the consultants Alvarez and Marsal completed their assessment on current staffing levels throughout the hospital. An unprecedented 30 minute discussion ensued between the board members, Jeff Smith and Trudy Johnson.

It was apparent from this discussion that Supervisor Kniss was adamantly in favor of the cuts, citing that to her recollection she had not seen any citations issued by the State that involved patient safety incidents. As witnessed in the June 14th workshop, Jeff Smith continued to whole heartedly support Nursing Administration's rationale for the cuts. In the end however, the BOS unanimously voted to uphold the cuts.

What do we do now? Nurses working in areas where the hospital is not meeting the nurse-to-patient ratios need to

Continue Budget Cuts

complete the *RNPA Ratio and Patient Care* Issues forms and fax it to the RNPA Office. Any compromises to patient care/safety should be documented by sending an email to your manager and cc to RNPA. If you are put in a situation where your licensure is being compromised, complete an Assignment Despite Objection form. If your department is not correctly considering acuity when making assignments let RNPA know. If you are not receiving your meal period make sure you claim it.

Be an advocate for patients as well as for yourself!

The Nurses' Choice for CA Governor

According to National Nurses United, "If the past is prologue, nurses and patients would fare very well if Brown, a former governor from 1975 to 1983, and current attorney general of the state, is elected governor in November."

In his first tenure as California governor, Brown substantially improved patient care standards as well as the workplace rights for millions of Californians. He implemented the nation's first nurse-to-patient ratios, in intensive care units, and enacted collective bargaining rights for employees of the University of California, including thousands of nurses.

A consistent ally of the labor movement, Brown signed the first agricultural labor relations law in the Country, and created an innovative job training program for low-income California, including thousands of nurses.

He also made California a national model in environmental and energy regulations and created the California Conservation Corps to provide the state's young people with employment in environmental stewardship and disaster response. Consumer protections enacted under Brown's leadership include the right to purchase generic drugs, and the nation's first affordable "lifeline" utility rates for seniors.

In his current role as California's Attorney General, Brown oversees corporations and

charities, including hospitals, and has blocked the sale of community hospitals to for-profit chains. His office is conducting an investigation into the denial of claims by insurance companies showing denial rates as high as 39 percent.

At the meeting, Brown decried corporate healthcare's emphasis on cost-cutting and skill degrading technology at the expense of patients. "We're in the midst of an effort to replace people with formulas, with protocols, with computer software, he said. "That really is inhuman. I see it in healthcare. We have to put the patient, the caregiver right in the forefront. A sense of morality, social justice, and a true spirit of democracy has to be the spirit going forward."

Brown's effective enforcement of workplace protections includes suing unscrupulous employers for denying workers wages and benefits required by state law, shutting down companies that have jeopardized worker safety, and prosecuting businesses that have bilked California's workers' compensation system or otherwise circumvented state tax and employment laws.

It's an unmatched record on behalf of working families. And it's a critical time for California. Having failed to solve the budget crisis for over two years-a crisis largely created by current governor Ar-

nold Schwarzenegger's givebacks to the richest Californians and excessive borrowing prior to the financial collapse-the state faces another \$20 billion deficit this year. Unemployment is at a modern record of 12.5%. We're just now seeing an increase in consumer spending but no significant uptick in hiring.

Brown's public service experience will bring Californians together to solve these problems. A Brown victory in the nation's most populated state would also pave the way to enact nurse-and patient-friendly legislation that could serve as a model for the rest of the country.

As California heads towards a November election, the two multi-millionaires vying to become Brown's Republican challenger boast that they will run the state "like a business." Arnold Schwarzenegger's administration has shown what corporate-style rule by a rich autocrat does for California nurses, patients and workers. Continuing with this approach is contraindicated.

Fortunately, California has an effective alternative: experienced leadership with a proven record on behalf of the state's working families.

If you have an address or telephone number change, please contact the RNPA Office, 292-6061....