

UPDATE ON COUNTY BUDGET IMPACTS TO RNPA

Over the course of the last several months RNPA has been involved in numerous meetings with hospital administration, labor relations and members of the Board of Supervisors to advocate for protecting current staffing levels in the midst of the biggest budget deficit challenge the County has ever faced.

Our primary goals during this time of diminishing county resources has been to ensure that as many RNPA coded positions as possible are preserved, that benefits are protected and that working conditions are maintained and/or improved. The ongoing County general fund deficit has made each of these goals very challenging and unfortunately several units have been impacted by plans that hospital administration is now implementing.

Fortunately, these plans resulted in the moving of RNs to different units and in some instances different areas of competency, and not in the termination of RNs from County employment. The preservation of our member's jobs in this difficult economy is foremost on our minds.

RNPA has been meeting and conferring with both hospital administration, labor relations and members of the Board of Supervisors to better understand the changes being contemplated and implemented in the health and hospital system. We have requested information and fought very hard to make the case that nurse-to-patient ratios must be met and that accurate patient acuity be factored into staffing plans. On a continuous basis RNPA advocates for safe staffing levels and when unsafe staffing patterns are brought to our attention we take action.

Currently the County general fund subsidizes the health and hospital system. Some years the amount has been in excess of two hundred million dollars. This means that non-health and hospital programs must be cut to find the money to continue status-quo operations within the health and hospital system. This is the dilemma that the elected Board of Supervisors must grapple with when requested by administration to approve adjustments to staffing based upon census, streamlining of services and/or other methods to reduce costs within the health and hospital system.

Recently, hospital administration informed RNPA of a census decline within MICC and of their desire to expedite the movement of the MSSU that was planned for after the completion of the new tower. The census decline in MICC would necessitate a commensurate reduction in staffing in that unit. The movement of the Inpatient side of MSSU from its current location would require implementation of lay off procedure resulting in the movement of several RNs to another unit within the HHS. We immediately requested information from hospital administration to validate what the impact could be if this plan was approved by the Board of Supervisors.

Once the information RNPA requested was evaluated we began outreach to the Board of Supervisors. In our meetings we stressed the importance of competency and training as well as retaining experienced coded nursing positions. We stressed the importance of not just looking at the census but evaluating the acuity of patients along with the census.

The hill we had to climb was that the health and hospital system was losing \$10 million dollars a month and that the changes that were being recommended would not result in actual RNPA layoffs and would save \$2 plus million dollars if implemented.

In this economic environment it is very difficult to argue against changes that will save money. In order to protect as many members as possible, we provided the decision makers with our best arguments culled from members and analysis of the information we requested. It is discouraging that members will be moved from their current assignment and that bumping will occur in other units, however we have worked to assure that no RNPA members are losing their employment with the County. We will continue to provide you updates as the mid-year budget becomes clear. As always, please phone the RNPA office with any questions.

Holidays

On September 9, 2011, RNPA filed a grievance regarding Santa Clara County no longer observing October 10, 2011 (2nd Monday in October), November 25, 2012 (Day after Thanksgiving), January 1, 2012, and February 20, 2012 (3rd Monday in February) for Fiscal Year 2012 along with the 2nd Monday in October and 3rd Monday in February for Fiscal Year 2013 without bargaining with RNPA.

According to the County, they believe that holidays fall under the County Wide Benefits Clause as they do in other bargaining agreements. RNPA believes that our Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is clear. The MOU states, "The parties agree that, during the term of this Agreement, Countywide benefits, such as medical, dental, life insurance or retirement, shall be applied to nurses in this unit."

Furthermore, Article 9—Paid Time Off, Section 9.1 Purpose, delineates 12 paid holidays that are included in your accrual factor. In addition in Section 9.9—Usage of Paid Time Off on holidays specifically outlines the legally observed for RNPA represented nurses.

RNPA representatives met with County Officials on two separate occasions to try to informally resolve this issue. On November 1, 2011, RNPA received the County official response to the grievance which stated that they believe the holidays are a County-wide benefit, and SEIU represents 50%+1 of the County employees, therefore bargaining of the holiday is applicable to the RNPA bargaining unit.

What's next? RNPA has requested that the County agree to an expedited arbitration hearing so we can resolve this issue immediately. We are awaiting a response. In the meantime, keep your schedules, paychecks, requests for Holiday Pay as well as denials. Our goal is to make all of our members whole for these holidays. Call the office, 292-6061, if you have any questions.

It's The Law

If there ever was a time to ensure that the State Nurse-To-Patient Ratio Law was being followed that time is NOW. Meeting the ratios strengthens our ability as RNs to provide quality patient care and it provides each individual RN protection from being assigned too many patients. We all know what could happen when we are assigned too many patients and none of those outcomes are good for anyone involved. If you experience a violation of the ratio law please inform RNPA.

It is your responsibility to report when the Nurse-to-Patient ratios are not being met. If you don't report it, do you think hospital administration will? In these dire fiscal times where budgets are being slashed and unit consolidations are becoming reality our ability to provide a level of care to our patients must be a priority to us. Never forget that we are patient advocates first and foremost. Call 408-292-6061 and report ratio violations.

Staffing to the ratios allows for breaks, lunches, and other duties that must be performed during each shift. Staffing to the ratios must also take the acuity of our patients into account. If the ratios are not being met you have an obligation to report it, it's the law.

RNPA members are being taken advantage of by hospital administration. We are caregivers by nature, we roll up our sleeves and get the job done even when our patient load is too high, even without breaks or support. We are nurses that take our job and our profession seriously. Well, it appears that management knows this as well. They will keep trying to cut RNs and they will say they are meeting the ratios unless we stand up for ourselves and say enough is enough.

Staffing to the ratios is critical, it is fair, and it is the right thing to do for our patients and to protect our individual licenses. RNPA has met with many units and have been told about the blatant disregard for the ratios. Unless RNPA knows about these ratio violations as they are happening, there is little we can do to address the violations. The time to act is now!

If you have a violation to report you can let RNPA know anonymously. Go to www.rnpa.net and download the ratio violation form, fill it out and fax it to RNPA—292-4729. Your union is ready to fight with you to make sure that hospital administration staffs to the ratios and is accountable, do your part and report it!
