

April 20, 2009

Dear Bargaining Unit Members:

We hear you loud and clear that hospital low census, with subsequent daily lay-offs of **PeaceHealth RNs**, has been a discouraging fact for several months. Your local unit officers and WSNA are doing everything possible to keep this issue in front of hospital administration, with the goal of eliminating and preventing daily lay-offs. Here is what we have already brought forward and proposed to management over the last three months at Conference Committees.

- 1) Kadlec Medical Center in Richland, WA has instituted a “no mandatory low-census layoff” policy for RNs, and Kadlec is managing to do this without negatively impacting its budget. Voluntary HC days are working there.
- 2) Low-census layoffs are a big factor in poor workforce morale, job satisfaction and nurse retention, and these things in turn cost the hospital more dollars in training new employees than they save, also negatively affecting the likelihood of Magnet status for the hospital.
- 3) Core plus two is too high a number of nurses per unit, and has resulted in over-hiring in the last year.
- 4) Charge nurses should be taken out of the staff allowance mix, given only charge nurse duties, and thus be available to relieve nurses on their unit when patient care is hectic.

We have repeatedly brought your concerns about this issue to the table at Conference Committee and read your actual comments (no names given) to management, and they assure us that they are listening. Management has agreed to a hiring freeze for now because of low census. They have shown us graphs which seem to indicate that the hospital census is slowly climbing, and that layoffs have lessened over the last two months. This is not what we are hearing from you, and we realize what a disheartening issue these layoffs have been. We must support our contract and long-term goals, and our contract describes how to reinstate nurses to their jobs if they get laid off; whereas Management alone dictates the number of nurses hired and the number of nurses laid off. Retention of the nurse workforce and betterment of RN working conditions are two of WSNA’s primary goals. That being said, we will bring these new thoughts before management at the next Conference Committee, and will continue to promote your interests:

- 1) Nurses at PeaceHealth, LCR feel that low-census lay-offs are at a crisis level, have impacted their living standards, and have reduced PTO benefits they have a right to use for vacation time.

- 2) Nursing morale is low, and senior nurses who have dedicated many years to the hospital are feeling dissatisfied and undervalued by management because of the daily layoffs.
- 3) Core plus one should be adopted and used for future hiring at PeaceHealth, LCR, and the hiring freeze should continue.
- 4) Management must seriously consider reducing patient numbers per staff RN caregivers, which would improve patient care, promote nurse retention and satisfaction, and limit low-census lay-offs.
- 5) Management must seriously consider returning the charge nurse role to charge nurse duties and staff relief/assistance, keeping charge nurses out of the staffing count.
- 6) Instead of low-census layoffs, management must try hard to keep nurses on the job doing trainings and competencies, and using them when possible as relief nurses for breaks and lunches.
- 7) Twelve-hour shifts, sometimes liked by staff and sometimes extremely disliked, should be revisited—it would be ideal if they were made optional, given the individual unit, staffing needs of the unit, and the nurse's preference. Twelve-hour layoffs have had a much worse impact on PTO than eight and ten hour layoffs.

Please let us know any other thoughts; we will gladly bring them to committee. The Conference Committee remains an ideal communication vehicle between Management and your WSNA representatives.

Together Everyone Achieves More!