



St. Joseph Medical Center RNs Demand Respect

November 29, 2011

Washington State Nurses Association (WSNA) is absolutely outraged with the administration's decision to move forward with their proposed changes to working conditions that will impact patient care throughout the hospital without involving you, the nurses who know best what your patients need. WSNA stands with you, the nurses at St. Joseph Hospital, in strong opposition against this proposal. We know that all of you are dedicated to the patients that you serve. It is unacceptable for the hospital administration to bypass and discount your feedback.

It is extremely troubling that the proposed restructure by hospital administration is based on the recommendations of an outside consulting group, and that administration claims they are making the changes in the name of protecting patient safety. Yet they never directly involved the nurses at the bedside and have admitted the proposed changes will potentially save millions of dollars.

The proposed changes will have a negative impact on patient care due to:

- Higher risk for errors with an increased in the number of patient hand-offs.
- An increase of both voluntary and mandatory overtime and mandatory call.
- Night shift nurses working more shifts thereby getting less needed nighttime sleep.
- Higher loss of experienced nurses who may leave Bellingham due to the elimination of 12 hour shifts.
- Additional use of temporary or travel nurses to fill vacancies.

Nurses are fully aware of the need to make responsible decisions about the financial well-being of the hospital, but also feel that they need to have a "voice" in advocacy for their patients. SAFETY and QUALITY of care should take priority over the financial bottom line.

Fatigue is a real concern for all of us. When you look at some of the practices at St. Joseph's, with nurses having mandatory call, not getting breaks, working on understaffed units, and lack of rest between shifts; these are the real issues we need to address.

The following responses from the RNs at St. Joseph Medical Center to a recent Washington State Nurses Association survey demonstrates the serious level of concern for the patient safety at this hospital:

- 94% do not have confidence that hospital administration is making decisions in the best interest of patient care and believe that hospital administration is making changes in the interest of their financial bottom line instead of what's best for patient care.
- 60% do not feel their unit has adequate staffing to achieve appropriate patient care.
- 51% agree with the statement "It is just by chance that more serious mistakes don't happen around here."

- 10% agree with the statement "St. Joseph Hospital Bellingham administration would never sacrifice patient safety to get more work done."

WSNA is dedicating every resource we have to this fight. From our legal team, to labor staff, to communications, to our Executive Director, we are standing with you and demanding that St. Joseph management respects your voices and your contributions to this hospital.

Since WSNA first learned of the restructure proposal, we have been working diligently to stop the hospital from moving forward and working with our nurses to send a strong response to the administration. We have met with you, the Local Unit, numerous times to discuss a coordinated response. We have had several meetings and conversations with management urging them to halt implementation and listen to the nurses' concerns.

We have respected the collective bargaining process and given negotiations a chance to work. It's apparent now that management is acting unilaterally and has no interest in working with you or your union. It's time to step up our actions, stand up for the professional expertise that nurses' bring to this hospital and take our message out to the public:

- Sunday Bellingham Herald newspaper ad announced our concerns to the community with an invitation to join us at the Rally for Respect on Dec. 1.
- The "Rally for Respect" on Dec 1st is about letting the public know what's at stake and letting hospital management know that nurses are ready to stand up for their patients and themselves. They need to hear from us and this community that you can't ignore nurses' voices when you make decisions that impact patient care.
- Petition from the RNs and the broader community demanding that St. Joseph Medical Center stop the implementation of the proposed plans for restructure and partner with the Registered Nurses to address morale and staff concerns to ensure quality and safe patient care for this community.

Hospital management needs to respect the knowledge and expertise of registered nurses. It's the only way to keep experienced nurses at St. Joseph's and to attract new nurses to work here.

The hospital has created this problem by not adequately staffing, and now they want the nurses to pay the price. It doesn't work that way. Nurses need the hospital to be a partner with them in providing excellent patient care, not an adversary.

Talking Points for the Public Regarding Petition:

- St. Joseph Medical Center is moving forward with a major restructure based on the recommendations of an outside consulting group, rather than the nurses at the bedside who know best what their patients need.
- We are concerned about the restructure and the impact on patient care.
- We need your support to demand that the hospital respect and collaborate with the nurses on decisions impacting patient care.