

President's Message

By HealthCare-PSEA President Sandi Zubek, RN

www.healthcarepsea.org

As I write this message, the snow and ice of winter still cling bitterly to the trees, lawns, and occasionally sidewalks and roadways. I hope by the time this newsletter reaches you, the sun is shining, the birds are returning, and the temperature is climbing!

Along with the change of seasons in nature, it is the change of seasons in our work. This time of year, the state legislators gather in Harrisburg to work on laws and policy. Thus, there can be legislation introduced that will impact nurses and other health care workers.

One key change that we have been pushing for over the years is a stronger state policy to promote patient safety by improving staffing across our field. While our work with fellow unions across Pennsylvania has not yet produced such laws, we succeeded in repeatedly emphasizing to our

legislators in both the House and Senate that the state needs to get cracking on these concerns.

I am pleased to report that our PSEA Government Relations team indicates the Legislature will be considering a bill that would benefit our patients and members. The Patient Safety Act would establish strong safety standards, particularly among the nurse-to-patient levels that play a crucial role in the quality of care we deliver to our patients. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Health, the most recent licensure survey showed that the highest factor of job dissatisfaction was staffing concerns. Similarly, the most common reason young nurses gave for leaving the professional was work stress, likely created by poor staffing conditions.

We understand that oftentimes administrators and their lobbyists

in Harrisburg push back hard to discourage legislators from passing stricter laws that would promote patient safety through better staffing standards. Nonetheless, that is why we as health care workers must raise our voices together to push our legislators to enact beneficial new laws.

Thank you to Sen. Maria Collett who was a nurse, and Reps. Tom Mehaffie and K.C. Tomlinson, who are the lead sponsors of the Patient Safety Act this legislative session. We applaud their initiative and pledge our support for this very important effort.

Stay tuned for future contacts about opportunities to reach out to your area's state representative and senator to promote this legislation when the time comes.

In the meantime, stay safe, remain strong, and remember we are in this together!

News from HealthCare-PSEA Locals

Bucks County Nurses Association

by **Bonnie Neiman**
PSEA UniServ Representative
and **Adam Clark**, PSEA Region
Advocacy Coordinator

The Bucks County Commissioners will soon vote on the new contract for the Bucks County Nurses Association, Unit 06 RNs, and Unit 86 Supervisors. The tentative agreement followed a full day of ratification meetings,

conducted by local president, Joyce Zuzack. Some highlights of the new contract, effective Jan. 1, 2021 through Dec. 31, 2024 are: 2% wage increases (exclusive of increment) each of four years with an increase to

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medical contribution of .25% of salary only in year one of the new contract. Some other gains for the members include increases in weekend shift differential, shift trades, and sick-day conversions. The health department nurses will receive an increase in mileage and liability reimbursement, and all nurses will see an increase in their uniform allowance. A new contract article will provide an annual shoe allowance for all nurses. All contract changes will be retroactively implemented.

Contract negotiations for this bargaining unit began on Feb. 24, 2020 and were suspended prior to a second session due to COVID-19. Virtual contract negotiations resumed on Oct. 23, which led to the tentative agreement. The union recognized this was an especially difficult year for everyone in health care, and this contract settlement provided a great sense of accomplishment for all those involved, and everybody is looking forward to four years of labor peace.

Highlands Hospital Nurses Association and Lab Technicians

By Maria Degnan, PSEA UniServ Representative

The Highlands Hospital Nurses Lab Technicians ratified a one-year contract on Nov. 12. The deal included: wage increases that will make them more competitive with area hospitals; no changes to health care; and some language pieces regarding absences and

scheduling that were important to our members. The union is already discussing a longer successor agreement.

Local leaders and hospital administration representatives met regularly to discuss various issues including the contract. The meetings proved to be very worthwhile for building and maintaining a good rapport between both parties. During these difficult times, association members are finding success with everyone working together, while looking forward to the end of the pandemic and better times ahead.

Indiana Registered Nurses Association

By Tim Tuinstra, HealthCare-PSEA UniServ Representative

The Indiana Registered Nurses Association (IRNA) began 2021 with an agreement on a 2% raise for all bargaining unit nurses effective Jan. 1 through Dec. 31. The parties also discussed plans to return to negotiations when the pandemic subsides. This is the first raise for the nurses in several years.

Beyond that raise, the union and hospital agreed to extend the incentive pay for nurses who agreed to work certain COVID-related shifts through the end of February. The parties continue to monitor the situation, and they are open to further extensions of incentive pay. Additionally, arrangements were made to make casual nurses eligible for the incentive pay since they are represented by the bargaining

unit. Along with pay-related issues, union leaders are exploring possible changes to the numerous monthly meetings that are scheduled between the union and administration. The meetings pertain to staffing and general professional issues. The changes are being discussed because of the challenges of juggling intense pandemic work and the officers' working varied shifts. Therefore, consideration is being given to combining some or all of them into fewer meetings.

Through it all, the nurses of the IRNA continue to give their all in the exhausting, challenging pandemic environment. Over the holidays and well into the new year, COVID case numbers surged dramatically. In mid-February they began to ebb somewhat. However, the potential of COVID variants causing another surge remains a real possibility everywhere, so the nurses will continue to monitor these things as time goes on.

Somerset Professional Nurses Association

By Tim Tuinstra, HealthCare-PSEA UniServ Representative

Somerset nurses reached a three-year contract with UPMC Somerset Hospital. The new CBA will run from Jan. 1, 2021 through Dec. 31, 2023. Pay raises will average a little over 2% for members each year for those moving through the salary schedule. Nurses on the top step will receive 1% raises. Also, an annual review of nurse-to-patient ratios was a success for

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the members who noted the current numbers had not been updated in over 20 years. Significant increases to nurses' out-of-pocket health insurance costs were agreed upon, as was a change to a paid time off category combining vacation, personal, and sick leave.

Somerset nurses separately

bargained incentive pay to encourage members to work more shifts on COVID-affected units in their hospitals. This incentive program continued early in the new year, with both parties open to possible extension, depending on the course of the pandemic.

Members bid a fond farewell to

local president Bill Carnell, who left the hospital after the holidays to work elsewhere.

In his time as president, he succeeded in substantially increasing the number and percentage of dues paying nurses. Casey Brown, the vice president, assumed the presidency.

AFT Nurses & Health Professionals

By Tim Tuinstra, HealthCare-PSEA UniServ Representative

As you know, you belong to a local health care union at your hospital, nursing home, or home health division. You are also aware that your local union belongs to a state union called HealthCare-PSEA, our statewide union. What you might not know is that your statewide union is affiliated with a national health care union, the AFT Nurses and Health Professionals. The result is that you enjoy strong leadership and a voice at the local, state, and national levels. That is an essential form of teamwork that unites each individual member into greater power at all levels on behalf of the union nurses and lab techs who provide such outstanding health care to Pennsylvanians. Our members belong to the AFL-CIO umbrella group of many unions nationwide. The AFT Nurses and Health Professionals support, and receive support from, millions of union workers in several dozen other fields and

professions across the nation.

Here is a brief overview of the national level of AFT Nurses and Health Professionals union. They were first known as the Federation of Nurses and Health Professionals and later as AFT Healthcare which was created in 1978 when the AFT constitution was amended to allow organizing and affiliation of health care workers. The division represents nearly 200,000 health professionals who practice in a variety of disciplines and settings. Although more than half of our members are registered nurses, the division also represents medical researchers, physicians, dietitians, psychologists, X-ray technicians, therapists, and others. AFT Nurses and Health Professionals is the second-largest nurses' union in the AFL-CIO.

Most AFT Nurses and Health Professionals members work in hospitals, although they also work in nursing homes, home

health agencies, laboratories, blood banks and clinics. The division's membership also includes approximately 15,000 school nurses. Nearly half of AFT Nurses and Health Professionals members work in the private sector, so their organizing and collective bargaining activities are governed by the National Labor Relations Act instead of state or local laws.

Every year, AFT Nurses and Health Professionals host a national professional issues conference where members learn about and discuss issues that affect health care workers throughout the country. They also hold special conferences for new leaders, local presidents, and school health leaders and activists. AFT Nurses and Health Professionals is one of only a few AFL-CIO unions accredited as a provider of continuing education in nursing by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation.

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NOTICE TO EMPLOYEES SUBJECT TO PSEA SECURITY CLAUSES

Negotiating and enforcing collective-bargaining agreements comes with costs. To spread these costs fairly, private-sector employees who do not join the Local Association, PSEA, and NEA but who still benefit from their collective-bargaining agreement can be required to pay an agency fee to maintain their employment, if such a requirement is contained in their workplace's collective-bargaining agreement. These provisions are known as union security clauses. These clauses are not uniform in their wording, but no provision can require anything more than payment of an agency fee to retain employment.

Many private sector labor unions establish agency fees that are equivalent to membership dues, but the agency fee of PSEA-represented employees will be a percentage of PSEA dues reflecting only the expenditures that PSEA annually makes on activities or projects germane to collective bargaining, contract administration, and grievance adjustment.

PSEA's practices regarding agency fee comply with the decisions of the National Labor Relations Board and the courts which held that unions must allow agency fee payers to object to the payment of fees to support activities not directly related to the core representational

responsibilities of collective bargaining, contract administration, and grievance adjustment.

The following summarizes those practices:

1. Where the collective bargaining agreement contains a union security clause, bargaining unit members who chose not to join the Local Association, PSEA and NEA will be charged an amount equivalent to a percentage of membership dues reflecting only the expenditures that the Local Association and PSEA annually make on activities or projects germane to collective bargaining, contract administration, and grievance adjustment. The chargeable percentage will include expenditures related to negotiations with employers, enforcing collective bargaining agreements, informal meetings with employer representatives, discussion of work-related issues with employees, handling employees' work-related problems through the grievance procedure, administrative agencies, or informal meetings, and aspects of union administration. In the past, approximately 70-75% of PSEA's expenditures have supported such activities.

Among other things, agency fee payers are not charged for charitable activities, lobbying or other legislative activities, support of political candidates, participating in political events,

recruitment of members to the labor organization, and members-only benefits (including members-only social events). In the past, approximately 25-30% of PSEA's expenditures have supported such activities.

2. Each year, the Local Association and PSEA will provide a notice to you as to the amount of the fee, along with a full explanation as to the calculation of the fee. That explanation will include a more detailed list of the categories of expenditures deemed to be "chargeable" and those deemed to be "non-chargeable," along with audited financial statements showing the expenditures on which the fee is based. Each year, agency fee payers will have the option of challenging the calculation of the reduced fee by filing an objection with PSEA, following the instructions contained in the notice. The objection will be resolved by an impartial arbitrator appointed by the American Arbitration Association, and your agency fee will be held in escrow until the decision is rendered. In addition, agency fee payers with conscientious religious objections to financially supporting a labor organization can notify PSEA of their objection and arrange to make a charitable contribution equal in amount to agency fee, instead of paying the agency fee.