

President's Message

By HealthCare-PSEA President Sandi Zubek, RN

www.healthcarepsea.org

Remember the good

Whew, what a crazy several months this has all turned into for everyone! COVID-19 virus sweeps in and turns our lives upside down in just a few weeks.

N95 masks, surgical masks, gowns, facial shields, always in short supply. Social distancing six feet apart. Many people working from home. Massive layoffs, some even among nurses ironically. Not enough personal protective equipment, referred to as "PPE." Staggered grocery store hours and stay-at-home orders for most people but not for nurses. Additionally, we are working in unfamiliar units because of cancellation of elective surgeries with topsy-turvy schedules that are light-years from our routines as nurses.

OK, I will take a breath and stop. It is all a story or stories to tell for the rest of our lives once all this ends. Hopefully, we get back to a not-too-different life like the one we knew

before. Among the stories we will tell each other, remember the good. Here are some of mine:

APPRECIATION FROM PSEA COLLEAGUES TO US IN HEALTHCARE-PSEA

Pizzas, donuts, coffee, snack bags, salutes to our sacrifice and dedication in the pandemic. Each of our locals—Bucks, Highlands, Indiana, Somerset—has received the thanks and gifts like those listed above, and we are grateful for this support expressed by our colleagues on the education side. We can feel the strength of belonging to the largest union in Pennsylvania.

PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT FROM HEALTHCARE-PSEA AND AFT HEALTH CARE

Speaking of strength and solidarity, we are also part of the American Federation of Teachers Health Care

division, AFL-CIO Local 5120, along with HealthCare-PSEA. This connection and partnership helped in a major life-saving way. Together they helped locate and ship to each of our locals the crucial PPEs: N95 masks, surgical masks, and facial shields. THANK YOU to all those who helped in those outstanding efforts.

MOST OF ALL, THANK YOU THE NURSES AND LAB TECHS OF HEALTHCARE-PSEA FOR ALL YOU DO IN THIS PANDEMIC

Going out of your routines, working in unfamiliar areas, taking more protective steps than usual. In this most historic time, your unprecedented dedication and selflessness inspire people across our state, and contribute more than you will ever realize, to the safety and lives of people from all walks of life. Be sure to take care of yourself, and when this is all over, I cannot wait to see you in person again!

News from HealthCare-PSEA Locals

Bucks County Nurses Association

by Bonnie Neiman
PSEA UniServ Representative

This spring has certainly brought health challenges to the entire

nation. Much appreciation to the HealthCare-PSEA nurses for your efforts in battling COVID-19 and putting patients first during the crisis. You are truly heroes!

At the Bucks County Health Department, some nurses were able

to continue their work remotely, while other essential personnel continued attending to daily functions in their face-to-face roles. Thanks to a supplemental Human Resource policy that was implemented in the face of COVID-19 those working

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Nurses and Health Professional members and employers

What nurses and health professionals can do to safeguard against the virus *submitted from AFT Health Care*

Health care workers are on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic. Protecting them from being exposed to COVID-19 is critically important so that they can continue to care for patients, avoid spreading the infection, and so that their own health is safeguarded. Nurses and other health care workers caring for COVID-19 patients are experiencing high levels of stress as they respond to the coronavirus outbreak.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention downgraded the recommended level of respiratory protection due to a shortage of N95 respirators, saying that facemasks are adequate for staff who are

caring for patients with suspected or confirmed COVID-19. The CDC's guidance appears to be based solely on a shortage of N95s rather than on science. Additionally, the agency failed to promote other kinds of respirators, such as powered air-purifying respirators (PAPRs) and elastomeric respirators.

Despite this change by the CDC, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration will continue to enforce the respiratory protection standard in relationship to COVID-19 with certain limits. OSHA promotes the use of other respirators in addition to N95s, such as N99s, N100s, powered air-purifying respirators, and half-

mask and full-facepiece elastomeric respirators. OSHA has relaxed the requirement for annual fit testing, but employers should continue with initial fit testing and fit-test workers if they have experienced significant weight fluctuations, dental changes, or other problems that impact the respirator seal. Employers must make a good faith effort to comply with the respiratory protection standard.

Now more than ever, health care employers must use strong screening and isolation protocols and other methods to reduce health care workers' risk of exposure to COVID-19 and to control infection spread.

News from HealthCare-PSEA Locals (cont. from Page 1)

in essential roles were provided with an additional hourly supplemental wage to perform those tasks.

The majority of the BCNA members work in the Neshaminy Manor nursing home. While nurses arrived at the facility to provide care for the elderly during the pandemic, they were required to have their temperatures taken. Any nurse with a temperature of 100.3 or greater was asked to return home. Those who did perform hands-on care wore masks and gloves (see photo).

In other news: BCNA's contract



Tricia Barish, Nicole Connors, and Melissa Sizemore, Bucks County Health Department.

expires on Dec. 31, 2020. Bargaining has begun, and the last session was on Feb. 24. Both parties have agreed

to suspend talks until the national health crisis calms.

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News from HealthCare-PSEA Locals (cont. from Page 2)

Highlands Hospital Nurses Association and Lab Technicians

By Maria Degnan, PSEA UniServ Representative

March has certainly been a whirlwind in the health care field. Our entire nation is lucky to have so many selfless health care workers who show up every day to fight COVID-19 on the front lines. The Highlands Hospital nurses and lab technicians are working hard through this national crisis to help defeat the virus.

Highlands Hospital currently has screening procedures in place for patients presenting with respiratory symptoms and/or a fever. They are also administering COVID-19 tests in accordance with CDC guidelines. Additionally, the hospital has restricted non-essential visitors and gatherings, while limiting patients to one support person. As a result of these restrictions, our professional issues meeting with hospital management originally scheduled for March 16 was mutually postponed until later in the spring to allow everyone to focus on defeating the coronavirus. HealthCare-PSEA is proud to represent these brave health care workers.

Indiana Registered Nurses Association

By Tim Tuinstra, HealthCare-PSEA UniServ representative

Indiana Registered Nurse Association members are responding to the coronavirus crisis by going above and beyond. Many nurses whose regular departments are seeing much lower census due to COVID-19 are now working in the ER, ICU, and

related areas where the census and acuity of patients is much higher.

As elsewhere, there is never enough Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to go around, and the scary challenge of handling a novel virus causing a pandemic has given even the most experienced nurses new things to confront and overcome.

Amid all this, the nurses continue to fight for a new contract that works for both sides. The contract expired on Oct. 31, 2018, and as of this writing, a successor contract was still not close to being finished. Nurses have gone over two years without a pay raise, yet they pay much higher costs for health insurance due to the draconian plans imposed by the hospital.

Despite that, the nurses continue to engage each other and the Indiana area community to build public support for a fair and new contract. And of course, they continue to provide top-notch quality care for the people in need through this crisis, especially coronavirus patients.

IRNA members also send a shout-out of thanks to the PSEA Central-Western leaders who arranged for snack bags to be delivered to the IRNA nurses during this crisis. A much-needed source of refreshment, and even more importantly, a visible sign of the solidarity for HealthCare-PSEA members in a moment of historic proportions.

Somerset Professional Nurses Association

By Tim Tuinstra, HealthCare-PSEA UniServ representative

Considering the ongoing coronavirus crisis, the Somerset Professional Nurses Association and

UPMC Somerset Hospital agreed to an extension of the contract to run through Dec. 31, 2020. It had originally run through March 23, 2020. For the rest of the year, nurses will receive a 2 percent raise over their previous rate; no step movement will occur until Jan. 1, 2021, assuming a new contract is in place by then. The rest of the contract remains intact and in force.

The parties intend to resume bargaining toward a new contract beginning in June, if the crisis has subsided enough by then. The goal is to bargain in person; however, if the social distancing rules and guidelines remain in place, then the bargaining will likely switch to a conference call format, likely via Zoom or similar technology platform.

In the meantime, the nurses are working cooperatively with the hospital to help Somerset County residents survive and recover during the coronavirus pandemic. As elsewhere, elective surgeries are cancelled, and many other routine treatments and procedures have been substantially reduced. As a result, several nurses are working outside their normal departments at least some of the time, with special attention to the emergency department and intensive care units, where the bulk of the coronavirus work goes on.

Additionally, the hospital system and union agreed to various temporary policies to continue paying nurses who lose work due to these cutbacks, and to offer them work elsewhere in the UPMC system on a temporary basis if they wish. These policies are intended to be used only during the pandemic.

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400 North Third Street, PO Box 1724
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania 17105-1724

Richard W. Askey
PSEA President

Aaron F. Chapin
PSEA Vice President

Jeffrey D. Ney
PSEA Treasurer

James G. Vaughan
PSEA Executive Director

Sandi Zubek
HealthCare-PSEA President

Erica Garcia
Designer/Layout

Paul Shemansky
Editor



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Margie Watters, Neshaminy Nursing Home.