

## President's Message

By HealthCare-PSEA President Sandi Zubek, RN

[www.healthcarepsea.org](http://www.healthcarepsea.org)

I've always believed that an informed patient makes for a healthier patient in the long run.

Knowing what you're up against, knowing the pros and cons of any given option, these are the key tools any health care consumer needs and wants in order to take control of their situation and make things better for themselves and their family.

It should be no different for nurses and fellow health care workers engaged in the profession of helping people to become healthy again.

How best do we work together, as professionals, to heal and improve our field?

The answer, here in Pennsylvania and the broader United States, involves increasing our commitment to joint action to build a stronger environment in which we can better serve our patients, wherever and in whatever setting, we labor.

Together, we've helped score some key advances in recent times. Consider:

A half million Pennsylvanians now have health insurance, who did not prior to 2015. Thanks to the Affordable Care Act's Medicaid expansion, finally adopted here in Pennsylvania by Gov. Tom Wolf shortly after he took office in 2015, those folks now can get treatment in our hospitals and other facilities.

Before, they waited until their conditions got really bad, and expensive, to come in for emergency room treatment. Our facilities then had to write-off the cost of providing such expensive care as uncompensated care. Now that's much less common. Together, we helped bring about this improvement.

Thanks to public pressure from health professionals and the general public, the state worked with UPMC

and Highmark to ensure that in communities where only one hospital serves the people, both entities' health insurance plans will be accepted, even when one of them runs the place. This will especially help in Somerset, where the local hospital will soon have a partner, most likely one or the other of those two.

What then can we do to keep building a stronger health environment in Pennsylvania?

A key effort right now is the continuing attempt to push for mandatory reporting of nurse-to-patient staffing information in Pennsylvania. Several HealthCare-PSEA members have visited legislators, gathered and sent postcards to legislators, and partnered with fellow nurse unions, to push for just such legislation. We are getting closer to our goal, with the purpose being to help consumers see the connection between reasonable staff workloads and quality of care.

As we continue working with our partners to push this transparency legislation, consider helping out in the ways outlined above, and just by spreading word among your family and friends with in-person conversations, social media posts, and more.

Thank you for all you do to help with these matters, Together, we will continue to advocate for our patients and a healthier Pennsylvania.

## SAVE THE DATE

### HealthCare-PSEA Annual Meeting

10 a.m. - Wednesday, Oct. 17, 2018

Johnstown Office  
333 Bloomfield Street  
Johnstown, PA 15904

# News from HealthCare-PSEA Locals

## Bucks County Nurses Association

### Committed to Nursing and Keeping the Union Strong

by **Bonnie Neiman**  
PSEA UniServ Representative

The Bucks County Nurses have been communicating their union interests and priorities to the Bucks County Nurses Association by completing and signing commitment cards.

In addition to individual interests, the card reads, “YES!! I want to BELONG. I am a proud member of my local association and PSEA. I commit to remaining a member so that we can get a good contract and protect our rights.” This is especially important as the BCNA faces contract negotiations in 2020.

The officers and building representatives have worked hard to safeguard contract fidelity, and it has been necessary to meet with administration on several occasions throughout the past year.

Often, the sides are able to reach agreement/understanding on issues during these meetings, however it has also been necessary to file grievances when those talks are not productive.

The 57 Bucks County nurses work in several disciplines throughout Bucks County. There are about 40 nurses at Neshaminy Manor, a long-term care facility. The Health Department and the Area Agency on Aging also have Bucks County Nurses Association nurses working in their facilities.

It is not always predictable when a problem will occur. The union has been able to ensure that inappropriate discipline is not issued, and the members of BCNA/HealthCare-PSEA have a fair and appropriate voice in the process.

## Highlands Hospital Nurses Association and Lab Technicians

### Perseverance and Support of Colleagues Foster High Achievement for Highlands Hospital Nurse

By **Stephanie Cramer**,  
PSEA UniServ Representative

It has been about 10 years since Brandy Swiech first stepped into Highlands Hospital as an employee in nuclear medicine where she performed diverse types of organ, tissue, or disease-specific scans. While this might have been Brandy’s first job in the medical profession, it wasn’t until she supported her mom through an unfortunate battle with cancer that Brandy was convinced she had to



*Nancy Morgan and Brandy Swiech*

pursue a career in nursing. At that point, Brandy decided to attend UPMC St. Margaret’s School of Nursing and graduated as a registered nurse with an associate degree.

While continuing to work in the ICU, a friend, already in school to become a nurse practitioner, encouraged Brandy to do the same. It was this past December that Brandy completed the program and graduated with a Master of Science in Nursing and Family Nurse Practitioner (MSN/FNP.)

Since that accomplishment, Brandy has been awarded a position to work directly with Dr. Ned Al-Fakih, a

well-respected physician at Highlands Hospital, in his own doctor’s office assisting his patients in Connellsville, Mt. Pleasant, Scottdale Manor, Amber House, and Harmon House.

For Brandy, as a new mom, the road has been challenging but rewarding. When she reflects on her journey over the last six years, she is grateful for the support she has received from her family, friends, and colleagues. Even though she will now only be working directly with Dr. Ned’s patients, she hopes to remain as a Casual Nurse at Highlands Hospital. “While it hasn’t always been easy at Highlands, it has been nice to have our union looking out for us,” Brandy adds. “Nancy is an excellent president. She pushes to resolve issues as quickly as possible. We need that in this profession and at Highlands.”

As President of HHNALT, Nancy Morgan sincerely adds, “We are going to miss Brandy. She is a great nurse and an asset to the hospital. We are so proud of her accomplishment and truly wish her the best.”

## Indiana Registered Nurses Association

By **Tim Tuinstra**, PSEA UniServ Representative

With a contract expiring near the end of this October, the bargaining team of the Indiana Registered Nurses Association is up and running.

So far, they have put together an overview of the many issues that will be discussed in bargaining. Sifting through member preferences, leftover goals from the last bargaining for the current contract, and evaluating conditions as they head into bargaining this time, the team members will soon have a completed list of bargaining goals, both economic and non-economic.

The team and UniServ representative have already been in touch with the hospital and the hospital

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

labor attorney to begin scheduling bargaining dates and times. As before, bargaining sessions will occur at a neutral site, the Quality Inn in Indiana, Pennsylvania.

In the time since the current contract was bargained, much has changed at the Indiana Regional Medical Center. The facility has bought up many physician practices across the region. Partnerships with various specialists have brought at least one new building to the main campus, as well as numerous doctor offices, etc.

Also, some specialties in the hospital are now run through partnerships with larger health systems and/or specialist practices. In promotions of these advancements to the public, the IRMC has bragged about how strong a position they are in today.

The IRNA bargaining team will keep all this in mind as preparations continue and as bargaining gets underway.

The team consists of the elected officers and numerous volunteers who offered to join the effort. Representation from across the entire hospital is reflected in the makeup of the bargaining team. Additionally, the services of the UniServ representative and Region Advocacy Coordinator will be used as things proceed.

Inspired by the success of the sister HealthCare-PSEA unions in their

recent years' bargaining, the IRNA team and membership are excited to head into these negotiations united and eager to accomplish important goals throughout the year.

### Somerset Professional Nurses Association

By Tim Tuinstra, PSEA UniServ Representative

As in so many rural hospitals, Somerset has experienced growing difficulty attracting and retaining health care professionals to provide the high level of quality care the community has long enjoyed.

The departure of the last baby-delivering doctor a few years ago led to closure of the maternity unit at Somerset Hospital, in one rather high-profile example.

Perhaps a bit less visible, but no less concerning, has been the increased ongoing challenge to attract and recruit nurses to work in Somerset Hospital.

In the current contract achieved two years ago, the Somerset Professional Nurses Association and hospital bargaining teams reached agreement on substantially increased pay, including starting pay, as well as certain bonus payments, to address this critical need.

While some success was attained, competitor facilities in the broader region simply responded by raising

their starting pay and such. One result is something of a revolving door among younger nurses.

While two years remain on the current contract, the SPNA and hospital are in talks to dramatically boost starting and overall pay, possibly by reducing the number of steps on the salary schedule. In addition, a more substantial roster of retention bonuses could be created. The goal would be to establish pay such that competitors would have a harder time taking away from Somerset newer and established nurses alike. With high hopes for the outcome, no further details can be given here at this time. Stay tuned for updates in future issues of *PULSE*.

Another way in which Somerset is like so many rural hospitals is that the facility is likely to partner with a larger regional or national health care system, possibly by the time you read this article. (At this time of writing, nothing has been made public.) What is known is that the Somerset Hospital community board of directors are in discussions with a large system to arrange for a new partnership which would bring sizable investments to help secure the hospital's future in the community. It is generally understood that the new partner would recognize the SPNA and continue to honor the current contract, along with any changes such as those being explored above. More details will follow in

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