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NURSES AT ST. CHRISTOPHER'S HOSPITAL FOR CHILDREN PICKET AT THE START OF NURSES WEEK

Nearly 500 St. Christopher's Nurses Picketed Outside Their Facility Today – On the First Day of Nurses Week – to Call Out the Hospital's Willingness to Compromise Patient Care By Refusing to Prioritize Nurse Retention

"St. Christopher's has become a stepping stone to CHOP. The way the hospital is run, It isn't a place most younger nurses stay, and that's not fair to our patients."

Philadelphia, PA – 485 nurses at St. Christopher's Hospital for Children in contract negotiations picketed outside the hospital today, on the first day of Nurses Week 2024.

The theme for Nurses Week is "Nurses Make the Difference." At no hospital is this more true than St. Christopher's Hospital for Children, which provides care for Philadelphia's most vulnerable children, many of whom are burdened with significant barriers to care: no transportation, parents who don't speak English, parents who aren't able to stay with their children at the ER or inside the hospital because they don't get paid when they don't show up to work.

"These are barriers we see every single day," says Sue Swift, RN, President of St. Christopher's Hospital for Children Nurses United, "so we run in circles to get our patients and their families what they need. Everything is against our patients' families – everything but the St. Chris caregivers."

Yet during bargaining, the hospital hasn't prioritized retention of these essential caregivers. RNs who work in chronically understaffed conditions risk their licenses on a daily basis, and nurse morale and quality of patient care suffers. Low wages at St. Christopher's compound the problem, and the hospital regularly hemorrhages nurses, who spend a couple years at St. Chris then move to CHOP.

"St. Christopher's has become a stepping stone to CHOP," says St. Christopher's Emergency Department Nurse Becky Murphy, RN, Vice President of St. Christopher's Hospital for Children Nurses United. "The way the hospital is run, It isn't a place most younger nurses stay, and that's not fair to our patients."

"We are out here today because we care about our patients," said Outpatient Nurse Deborah Young, RN, St. Christopher's Hospital for Children Nurses United Member at Large. "We care about their safety. We

care about respect for this community. That's why we feel very strongly that the hospital needs not only to attract nurses but we also need to retain nurses. Retaining nurses means safe staffing and better care for our patients."

At the core of the nurses' negotiations are quality of care issues including unsafe staffing, respect for caregivers, and low retention rates for nurses. The nurses' previous contract expired on January 31, 2024.

"Tower's offer to us in terms of wages wouldn't solve any of the problems inside the hospital," said ER nurse Dean Coffin, RN. "It wouldn't help us with retention, it wouldn't help bring any new nurses into St. Chris. All it did was reveal that Tower doesn't give a hoot about the staffing here at St. Chris or about the community or the patients. It's all about the bottom dollar for them."

"Nurse retention is a huge problem at St. Chris," echoed Angela Lariscy, RN, Oncology Transplant Unit Nurse. "And who gets short-changed when the hospital isn't properly staffed? Our patients! 25% of the children in Philadelphia live below the poverty level, and St. Chris takes care of a lot of them."

Lucille Brunetti's photo was actually featured in St. Christopher's social media post in honor of Nurses Week. "And yet, here I am, outside picketing!" the Neonatal ICU Nurse said. "I'm picketing for safer staffing and better care for our tiny, very vulnerable patients. They are why we are fighting. We are fighting for Philadelphia's most vulnerable."

St. Christopher's Hospital for Children Nurses United is an affiliate of PASNAP, the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals, which represents more than 11,000 frontline nurses and healthcare professionals across Pennsylvania and was founded on the belief that patients do better when critical care staff have a voice to advocate for their patients and themselves.