



## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **100 Frontline Caregivers at Warren General Hospital Overwhelmingly Ratify A New Union Contract That Meaningfully Benefits Both Their Hospital Community and the Warren Community at Large**

***"It Was Always Our Intent to Care For Our Community Inside the Hospital and Out"***

#### **Challenges Facing Rural Hospitals and Communities Post-COVID Central to Negotiations**

**WARREN, PA, OCTOBER 17, 2024** – Today, 100 frontline caregivers at Warren General Hospital overwhelmingly ratified a new 3-year contract that meaningfully benefits both caregivers and the community alike and directly addresses some of the staffing and economic challenges facing rural hospitals and communities in this post-pandemic time.

**The vote for the caregivers' new 3-year contract, completed today at 7:30 p.m., was an overwhelming 94% in favor of ratification.**

The staffing shortages that have plagued hospitals nationwide post-pandemic have been particularly acute in rural communities, and prior to this contract, Warren General Hospital had relied on agency nurses from outside the Warren community to keep the hospital fully staffed. But the Union's goal throughout negotiations was to benefit their community inside the hospital and out.

"Coming into this contract negotiation, one of our primary objectives was to support the Warren community itself economically by reducing the number of traveling nurses we have in the hospital," says Warren General Hospital Professional Employees Association President Char Fohrd, RN, a Maternal Child Health Nurse who has spent her entire nursing career at Warren. "We wanted to care for our community inside the hospital and out, and with this contract's new staffing language, we have."

"The hospital understood that this was our goal from the beginning," says Warren General Hospital Professional Employees Association Vice President Lisa Lundberg, RN, a Case Management Nurse and 11-year veteran of Warren General Hospital, "and they respected it."

#### **The caregivers' new three-year contract includes:**

- **Meaningful commitments to staffing – a key quality of care indicator – in the hospital and from within the Warren Community.** For the first time, the Union won enforceable staffing guidelines for nurses and technologists in their contract. The "grids" establish upper limits on the number of patients nurses and technologists can care for at a time and are dependent on a patient's unit and acuity.

In addition: According to the new contract, tentative schedules showing unassigned shifts will be emailed to bargaining unit members before they are distributed to agency nurses. Members will have 72 hours to volunteer for shifts before long-distance agency nurses have the opportunity to do so themselves.

- **Excellent benefits package for recruitment and retention of skilled caregivers to the Warren community.** Members protected their retirement benefits and health insurance in addition to gaining improved vacation time and a better vacation accrual process for newly hired members.
- **New wage scales with healthy wage increases, also to increase retention of skilled caregivers from within the Warren community:** Nurses and techs will receive overall increases of 16% over the three years of the contract, which should go a long way toward attracting caregivers and improving retention of existing staff, all to the benefit of the community.

“I’m incredibly proud of how we worked together for the betterment of everyone involved – our patients, the Warren community, and each other,” says Bargaining Committee member Michelle Lord, MT(ASCP), a medical technologist who has worked at Warren General for 20 years.

“At the end of the day, I think the bargaining process and the results we were able to achieve reflect a hard-won mutual respect between our Union and hospital management,” says Fohrd. “We kept care for our patients and the health of our community foremost in all of our minds, which is as it should be, of course. But I’m grateful for it and for the results nonetheless.”

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**Warren General Hospital Professional Employees Association** *is an affiliate of PASNAP, the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals, which represents 11,000+ frontline nurses and healthcare professionals across Pennsylvania and was founded on the belief that patients receive the best care when clinical-care staff have a strong voice to advocate for both patients and themselves.*

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