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Nearly 250 Frontline Nurses at Mercy Fitzgerald Overwhelmingly Ratify A New Union Contract That Further Protects Patients and RNs Alike

“When We’re Talking About Human Lives, Staffing Should Always Be Prioritized – And In This Contract, It Is. Hospital Leadership Listened When We Spoke About What We So Desperately Need At the Bedside In Order to Care Properly For Our Patients and To Retain Our Staff.”

Safe Nurse Staffing – a Key Quality of Care Indicator – Was the Nurses’ Primary Focus Throughout Negotiations

DARBY, PA, NOVEMBER 18, 2024 – Today, nearly 250 frontline nurses at Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital overwhelmingly ratified a new 3-year contract that meaningfully benefits both patients and caregivers by ensuring Mercy Fitzgerald RNs have the staff and resources needed to provide safe and exceptional care to the Mercy Fitz patient community, which has ballooned in recent years in the wake of nearby hospital and service closures.

The vote for the nurses’ new 3-year contract, completed today at 7:45 p.m., was an overwhelming 95% in favor of ratification.

“Even now, several years post-COVID, the system that’s supposed to support bedside healthcare professionals and therefore patients is in crisis,” says PASNAP President Maureen May, R.N., a longtime Temple University Hospital nurse. “Following the worst pandemic of our lifetimes, hospital staff numbers have dwindled nationwide due to burnout. This contract, with its emphasis on staffing and measures to improve retention, acknowledges the contributions of frontline caregivers and by prioritizing their numbers and respect for what they bring to the bedside, also prioritizes patient care.”

At the core of the caregivers’ negotiations, completed the day before their previous four-year contract expired, were critical quality of care issues such as safe staffing and recruitment and retention of caregivers.

The staffing shortages that have plagued hospitals nationwide post-pandemic combined with the closure of nearby Delaware County Memorial Hospital (DCMH) two years ago and the increased patient volume at Mercy Fitz that resulted have, in combination, exerted tremendous stress on Mercy Fitzgerald RNs. Prior to this contract, the hospital relied solely on its nurses working extra shifts and utilizing Trinity’s First Choice Staffing agency RNs to keep the hospital staffed.

“Safe staffing is crucial to providing safe and effective patient care – they go hand in hand,” says Mercy Fitzgerald Emergency Department nurse Sue Brusco, RN, co-president of the Fitzgerald Mercy Hospital Nurses Association; the Mercy Fitz Emergency Department was hit especially hard by the closure of DCMH. “When we’re talking about human lives, staffing should ***always*** be prioritized – and in this contract, it is. Hospital leadership listened when we spoke about what we so desperately need at the bedside in order to care properly for our patients and to retain our staff. And this contract delivers.”

The nurses’ new three-year contract includes:

- **Meaningful commitments to staffing – a key quality of care indicator.** The new contract stipulates that the hospital will fulfill outstanding full-time-employee positions, making more full-time staff available for the ER and floors. Per the new contract, the “Staffing Committee” is now able to request a meeting with Hospital Administration, outside of the yearly commitment, to discuss critical staffing concerns and collaboratively work toward solutions to improve patient care and retain seasoned staff. Plus, per the new contract, staffing grids will be posted on each floor, and if the grids are not met, the hospital will be held accountable for following procedures to obtain staffing.
- **Excellent benefits package for recruitment and retention of nurses.** 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.
- **Healthy wage increases, also to increase retention of skilled caregivers.** Nurses will receive overall increases of 10.5% over the life of the contract, which should go a long way toward attracting caregivers and improving retention of existing staff, all to the benefit of the Mercy Fitz patient community.

Mercy Fitzgerald Hospital is a 178-bed teaching hospital located in Darby, Pennsylvania, that serves 186,000-plus patients in Delaware County and Southwest Philadelphia every year. Along with St. Mary Medical Center in Bucks County, Mercy Fitzgerald is owned by Livonia, Michigan-based Trinity Health, which owns 101 hospitals across 27 states.

“I was born in this hospital,” says Mercy Fitzgerald ICU nurse Terry Noga, RN, co-president of the Fitzgerald Mercy Nurses Association. “I had each of my four children at this hospital. And I’ve worked here since 1985, for the entirety of my career. I am a caregiver here, and I have been a patient here, and I am so very proud of what we and hospital leadership, together, were able to accomplish for my colleagues and our community in this contract.”

The Fitzgerald Mercy Nurses Association is an affiliate of PASNAP, the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals, which represents 11,000-plus 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 their patients and themselves.

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