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“Where is the Respect for Patient Care?”

Nurses at Lower Bucks Hospital Picket Outside Their Hospital to Protest Dangerous Staffing Conditions That Have Left Their Patients and Their Community High and Dry

This Is the Second Picket in a Week By Nurses at Local Prime Healthcare-Owned Facilities

Briston, PA – In the midst of a nationwide nurse staffing crisis, Prime Healthcare – the California-based corporate umbrella for dozens of U.S. hospitals including Lower Bucks Hospital and Suburban Community Hospital in Norristown – is actively undermining the quality of care in its area hospitals by persistently failing to staff them appropriately. Patient care and bedside RNs are suffering while Prime rakes in profits from its disservice to the vulnerable communities that surround its Pennsylvania hospitals.

Today, the nurses at Lower Bucks Hospital sounded the alarm. A week earlier, nurses at Lower Bucks’ sibling hospital, Suburban Community Hospital, picketed at their facility. The nearly 200 unionized RNs and LPNs are both currently negotiating contracts with their mutual owner.

“We nurses hold our patients in our hearts,” says ICU nurse Shirley Crowell, R.N., co-president of the Nurses Association of Lower Bucks Hospital. “When we need to leave the bedside and head outside to fight for safe staffing and quality of patient care, it breaks our hearts. But we’ll do it, because we are our patients’ best advocates.”

Prime is a California-based employer; California is the only state with legally mandated nurse to patient ratios. Prime is fully capable of staffing safely and to the law in California but flat out refuses to do so in Pennsylvania, endangering their patients and their nurses, who daily risk moral injury to consistently care for more patients at a time than is possible to do safely – a recipe for burnout, mistakes, and bad outcomes.

There are shifts in which the Lower Bucks Hospital Emergency Department is staffed with just two nurses all night and there are no housekeeping staff available to take out waste and clean rooms.

Because Prime provides its caregivers with grossly inadequate health insurance and fights them every step of the way on any medical claim they make, staff turnover is high and Prime’s ability to attract experienced nurses to its Pennsylvania hospitals is low.

Amanda Whitaker, R.N., a Lower Bucks Hospital ICU nurse and member of the Nurses Association of Lower Bucks Hospital, is still fighting with Prime four years later to cover her son's hospital stay when he was diagnosed with life-endangering RSV. "They deny, deny, deny without even looking at the situation," she says. "Honestly, it feels like a punch in the face. We're in healthcare and we can't even afford health care. It's wrong on so many levels."

It's also a Prime strategy to augment their profits. In bargaining, hospital management has made proposals to gut the nurses' contract, all the while ensuring that they are able to enrich themselves. Lower Bucks Hospital CEO Michael Mott rakes in well over a quarter-million dollars per year while his hospital is short-staffed on a daily basis due to massive employee vacancies caused by poor compensation and benefits.

"The nurses at Lower Bucks Hospital – some of whom have spent their entire careers here – are fiercely loyal to our patients, to our community, and to our hospital," says Crowell. "But we shouldn't have to beg for a decent healthcare plan or for wages that are comparable to those offered at surrounding hospitals. Where is the respect for what we bring to the bedside? Where is the respect for patient care?"

"Prime needs to take its nurses and our issues seriously," says ICU nurse Anna Carlin, RN, co-president of the Nurses Association of Lower Bucks Hospital. "We need safe staffing for our patients' protection, and we need a decent healthcare plan for our members so we can retain the experienced nurses we have and continue to serve our patient community to the very best of our abilities."

Lower Bucks Hospital and Suburban Community Hospital are two of three Philadelphia-area facilities owned by Prime, the fifth-largest for-profit health system in the United States. Prime is the only medical facility system in the country to have settled three federal civil cases alleging Medicare fraud in the last six years.

Summary of Issues attached.

The Nurses Association of Lower Bucks Hospital and the Suburban General Nurses' Association are affiliates of PASNAP, the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals, which represents more than 9,000 frontline nurses and healthcare professionals across the Commonwealth 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.