

What nurses want for their patients

By Sandy Eaton, RN

In May—in time for Nurses' Week—Sandy Eaton, RN and the MNA representative to MassCare, was interviewed on Valley Free Radio, 103.3 FM in Western Massachusetts. Eaton provided the radio audience with insightful commentary about what nurses want for their patients.

Nurses advocate for our patients. That's what we do. We do it in clinical practice. And we do it across the bargaining table and through political action. When our delegation met with Sen. John Kerry's aide in Washington recently, one of our members told of a patient who fell through the cracks of our Massachusetts health care system. Due to co-pays and deductibles, he could afford prescribed medications or food. He chose food, and ended up in critical condition in the Emergency Department as a result. He died there.

Nurses know that health care in this country requires a thorough recasting. Nurses know that health care must be treated as a human right, not as a market commodity. We know that we must tackle access, affordability and quality together, or we'll wind up with what we

have now in Massachusetts, something that's not universal, not sustainable and not fair.

A few weeks ago I spoke to a roomful of nurses in Portland, Maine about our decades-long struggle in Massachusetts to create a just health care system. I related our long list of partial reforms, as well as the crucial campaigns that have so far been thwarted by the vested interests of the insurance and hospital industries. I talked about our campaign to amend the state constitution to proclaim health care a right, not a privilege. I talked about our long hard fight to enact legislation placing an enforceable limit on the number of acutely ill patients a nurse may care for at one time. Both of these initiatives were killed in the name of the Massachusetts plan.

When I concluded my remarks, a Maine nurse raised her hand to ask when we were moving on to civil disobedience. Ironically, eight days later eight activists in the fight for single-payer, universal health care rose one by one in the chamber of the Senate Finance Committee to demand a seat at the table for Medicare-for-all advocates. One by one they were arrested, and

now the Baucus Eight (named for the committee chair, Sen Max. Baucus, D-Mont.) face up to six months in jail for speaking truth to power.

This year Nurses' Week culminates with nurses in Washington spending Florence Nightingale's birthday pounding on the door demanding admittance for advocates of health care justice. Five more have just joined the ranks of the Baucus Eight: two nurses, two physicians and a patient activist.

As I speak, nurses led by the California Nurses Association and its National Nurses Organizing Committee are joining with hundreds from many states and other organizations. They're rallying at the U.S. Capitol for the single payer solution, Medicare for All. They want patient safety measures like enforceable limits on patient loads. They want a ban on mandatory overtime. And they want Congress to pass the Employee Free Choice Act, a measure that would greatly enhance the power of nurses and other workers to counter industry greed.

What's good for nurses is good for patients, too. It's time to make health care serve people, not corporate greed. ■

Western Mass. rally for single payer health care

MNA members in Western Massachusetts are participating in a campaign for real health care reform, based on a single payer health care model, as proposed under federal legislation, HR.676, the Expanded Medicare for All bill. More than 100 advocates gathered in Spring-

field in late May for a "reform rally," which featured a speech by Gail Bean, RN and MNA member-activist.

MNA has been a supporter of a single payer health care system since 1994 and is engaged in efforts across the commonwealth and the nation to make it a reality.



MNA member Gail Bean spoke at the Springfield Rally for Single-Payer health care on May 27. More than 100 people attended the rally, including several MNA members. Bean was also interviewed by local TV and radio outlets.

Reformers succeed to get Rep. Markey to support single payer

Seventh District health care reformers were successful in their stepped-up campaign to convince Rep. Ed Markey to be a supporter of a national single-payer bill.

After advocates wrote to Markey and met with the congressman's aides in his district office, the Malden Democrat agreed to sign on as a co-sponsor of HR 676, the national Medicare-for-All bill.

The decision followed a May 11 letter from a group of more than 50 prominent Seventh District constituents that concluded:

"Whatever health reform Congress does consider, we believe needs to be held up in comparison with a single-payer plan as the 'gold-standard' for cost-efficient, equitable, and universal care. We need your leadership in supporting and advancing this ideal, and building momentum for truly sustainable, universal health care in this country."

A delegation of 18 people from seven cities and towns in the district then went to Markey's Medford office to make the case for single payer reform. The group, including Sandy Eaton, RN, of the MNA, met with Markey's District Director Mark Gallagher and Congressional Aide Patrick Lally. ■