Talks Continue Between Tufts Nurses and Management
Nurses Reject Hospital’s Demand That Nurses Withdraw Their Call for Safer Staffing Levels

The registered nurses and the management of Tufts Medical Center met yesterday and negotiated for 10 hours, with most of the time devoted to the issue of mandatory overtime, where some progress was made. Yet the hospital refuses to give nurses the right to refuse forced overtime when they feel too ill or exhausted to provide safe patient care. This is the standard in more than 20 hospitals across the state, and is in keeping with the recommendations of the Institute of Medicine. On the issue of staffing, the hospital continues to object to any discussion of improving their RN-to-patient ratios, and defended their practice of assigning medical-surgical nurses up to seven patients, and assigning ICU nurses up to three patients. Research shows these ratios place patients at a significantly increased risk for injury or death. They did offer to add some FTEs to the float pool, and to piloting the assignment of three charge nurses to specific floors without an assignment. However, these changes will have no impact on nurses’ day-to-day patient assignments and will not address the current patient safety crisis.

The talks stalled when, at the end of the day, management issued an ultimatum that to continue discussions the nurses would need to agree that there could be no changes to the current staffing plan or any enforceable limit on nurses’ patient assignments. The nurses responded that this was the membership’s top priority and expected the parties to engage in a good faith effort to address the current staffing plan and the unsafe conditions at the hospital.

“It was clear to us that the ultimatum issued by the hospital at the end of the session was a cynical ploy to allow management to stall the talks and continue their new effort to paint your legitimate call to change the staffing grid as an agenda not the nurses own,” said Barbara Tiller, RN, chair of the MNA bargaining unit. “We refuse to play games with our nursing practice or the safety of our patients. We told management that we would not agree to their unreasonable demand to table our number one concern, which is the need to improve dangerous staffing conditions at the hospital.”

Last week, several hundred Tufts nurses picketed in front of the hospital. On the same day as the demonstration, a delegation of nurses delivered a petition signed by 80 percent of Tufts RNs to CEO Ellen Zane protesting the dangerous staffing conditions and demanding immediate improvements to protect patients.

The parties will meet again on March 28, which is our next to last scheduled session.

“We sincerely hope the hospital will finally come to the table determined to resolve these issues. Our goal from the beginning of day one has been to work in good faith towards a settlement that protects our patients. If we have an agenda, it is to ensure the safety of our patients” Tiller explained. “To that end, we are determined to do whatever it takes to protect our patients because they are the ones who have the most to lose if conditions don’t improve. For our patients, this is truly a matter of life and death.”