

Nurse union eyes harmful time to strike

DAN ATKINSON
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The Massachusetts Nurses Association is planning a strike designed to be “**most harmful**” to Tufts Medical Center’s bottom line, according to union organizers who suggest the action could target a day when elective surgeries like knee replacements are scheduled.

“They’ll cancel elective surgeries like knee-replacement surgeries — those probably bring in the **most** dollars,” **MNA** spokeswoman Jen Johnson said yesterday as a **firestorm** erupted over an email sent out by the union to Tufts nurses.

The email, sent Thursday by **MNA** union organizer Ryan Berard, says the union refused to go back to the negotiating table because of concerns over staffing and wages, and is now actively planning a strike.

“We are planning a strike,” Berard wrote, adding, “we need to determine the best dates that will be **most harmful** to the hospital (from an economic standpoint) otherwise the strike will be ineffective.”

In an email to employees yesterday, Tufts Medical Center CEO Michael Wagner wrote: “If the **MNA** is sincere in trying to financially cripple Tufts Medical Center, then that harms all of us, including the nurses the union represents. If we are not strong, we cannot invest in our people or our services.”

Tufts spokeswoman Rhonda Mann said the hospital had “dozens of nurses mail us this communication yesterday” who were “horrified by it.”

“We’re willing to work creatively with **MNA** on this but hearing this kind of language is just disappointing,” she said, adding no elective surgeries would be canceled, regardless of any strike action.

Johnson, meanwhile, insisted the strategy of inflicting economic harm wouldn’t hurt patients and said the hospital has ignored nurses’ calls to improve patient care.

“Economic harm is not related to patient care in this instance. We do not believe we’re compromising patient safety,” Johnson said. “Nurses in all instances have patient safety and patient care at the forefront of their minds, that’s the reason for the strike — for too long the hospital has not taken their concerns about improving patient care seriously.”

Asked about the backlash to the email, Johnson said she didn’t believe members forwarding it to management showed discord in the union.

“The vast majority have voted for all steps of this process,” Johnson said, saying the email “will do nothing except mobilize nurses more.”

Tufts nurses have been without a contract for 14 months. Earlier this month the union rejected a contract that would have given nurses pay raises ranging from 5.5 percent to 10.5 percent through 2020. Hospital officials say they have a plan in place to hire nurses from an outside agency to fill positions.