



Berkshire Health Systems, Inc.

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Dear Berkshire Medical Center Community,

We are disappointed but not surprised that the Massachusetts Nurses Association called for and obtained authorization for a second strike by registered nurses at Berkshire Medical Center. If the MNA bargaining committee chooses to exert this authority and the nurses go on strike again, the hospital will continue to provide uninterrupted high quality patient care, just as we did in October.

Last week, Brenda Cadorette, RN, Vice President, Acute Care & Chief Nursing Officer, shared in a letter to nurses that the January 9 negotiating session with the union was collaborative and cooperative, as were the three sessions before that. The BMC bargaining team felt progress was being made toward final resolution. Despite our disappointment with this week's strike vote, our team is eager to continue to seek contract agreement at sessions scheduled for January 25 and February 8 and 13.

We would like to take this opportunity to recap some of the progress we have made in the contract negotiations since the strike of October 2017.

We reached consensus on contract language addressing **safety and security issues**. The language includes confirmation that no nurse will face hospital disciplinary action if he or she responded in a reasonable way to safety threats from patients or visitors. The consensus also assures that nurse members of the hospital's safety committees will be released, whenever reasonably possible, from nursing work assignments so they can participate fully in the committee work.

The hospital offered to **create new positions to help improve staffing**. The flex positions offer a part-time commitment, 16 to 24 hours that will flex up to 32 hours per week if needed, with eligibility for full health insurance benefits even if a nurse generally works fewer than 32 hours. Unfortunately, the union rejected that proposal as unnecessary and unwanted.

The hospital has offered a **Staffing Committee** process where MNA staff nurses have meaningful participation in establishing and adjusting nurse staffing guidelines. BMC made that proposal as a result of concerns RNs expressed in negotiations. Responding to comments by the nurses, the hospital has recently added to the proposal a commitment that it will not be able to change the staffing guidelines now in effect, without first taking the proposed change the Staffing Committee for its review and comment if the effect of the change will be to increase the number of patients that may be assigned to a nurse.

The union has asked that **charge nurses** never be assigned to take care of any patient. The hospital tries to keep charge nurses free of assignment, but cannot agree to contract language that says so because there are occasionally times during a day when a charge nurse assignment is unavoidable.

We are pleased that we have found these areas to enhance the offer that we made in May. The original comprehensive offer included:

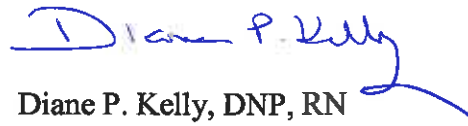
- A total of 10 percent in wage increases over three years;
- Increases in pay differentials for evening and night shifts; and
- Maintaining a generous health insurance package that has no deductibles and few, if any, copay requirements.

Achievements such as BMC's recent Patient Safety Excellence Award (and many similar national awards over many years) happen because of the strength of our team of care givers of all professions and disciplines. We value the contributions of the entire team, including the registered nurses. Despite issues such as the strike vote, we know our nurses, and all of you, remain focused first and foremost on safely caring for our patients with expertise and compassion.

Respectfully,



David E. Phelps
President & CEO
Berkshire Health Systems



Diane P. Kelly, DNP, RN
Chief Operating Officer
Berkshire Medical Center