

## Advancing a culture of health. Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Hampshire and Connecticut.

To the Berkshire Community:

Berkshire Medical Center (BMC) is engaged in contract negotiations with the Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA), which has authorized a strike beginning on October 3rd. While wages and rigid approaches to nurse staffing are being discussed, the nursing union (MNA) is also using the contract negotiation process as a testing ground for its larger campaign to impose rigid nurse staffing mandates through a statewide ballot question in November 2018.

However, in its zeal to launch its political campaign in Pittsfield, the MNA nursing union has overlooked one key detail: The facts. Berkshire Medical Center provides excellent patient care, as evidenced by exemplary patient outcomes.

According to objective outside evaluators, their quality record is impressive.

- BMC was ranked number one in Massachusetts for medical excellence and overall care by the independent CareChex Quality Rating System.
- The hospital's recent Patient Safety Indicator (PSI-90) score from the Agency for Research and Quality, an agency of the federal Department of Health & Human Services, put it tied for first in the entire nation.
- Healthgrades, the nation's leading online source for comprehensive information about hospitals and physicians, awarded BMC a 2017 Patient Safety Excellence Award for placing in the top 10 percent of US hospitals for patient safety.

To achieve such excellent quality scores, clinical nurses and nurses in leadership roles regularly work together to ensure that the needs of patients and families are met. During my 20 years of experience working as a staff nurse in the intensive care unit, emergency department, medical-surgical and oncology units; as a nurse director of an inpatient unit; and as a nurse that has earned a MBA and a PhD, I fully understand the demands of bedside nursing and the importance of using professional judgment, experiential knowledge, and data to make informed patient care decisions.

These impressive outcomes occur with team-based, responsive planning by nursing, medical, and other health care professionals, not uniform, unrealistic government mandates.

The nursing team at BMC sets and adjusts its staffing levels by taking into consideration factors including patient complexity, acuity, and stability; the number of admissions; skills of the nurse; discharges and transfers; the actual space occupied by a unit; and the availability of technological support or other resources. Nurse staffing levels at BMC meet, and in some cases even exceed, industry standards. For example, on medical-surgical floors, the hospital exceeds the staffing recommendations established by the Academy of Medical-Surgical Nurses during both the day and night shifts.

Additionally, patient care is not delivered by nurses alone, but by an integrated care team. In my experience, when nurses are asked what they need for support, their first answer is not necessarily more nurses. They often see a physical therapist, pharmacist, nursing aide, dietary aide, unit secretary, or housekeeper as a pressing need. This allows nurses to do what they do best: provide direct care for patients. Without these key members of the care team, nurses could be alone when in need of clarifying information on a medication or a mobility plan for a high risk patient. With strong leadership, BMC emphasizes that team-based approach to care, which would be endangered by rigid staffing mandates called for by the nursing union, the MNA.

The nurse-patient relationship is the essence of nursing and nurses are a significant contributor to patient safety and creating healing environments. As a nurse and as the CEO of an organization that supports the development and advancement of our profession, it's disappointing that the nursing union, the MNA, has chosen to ask their membership to breach the fundamental covenant nurses have with patients by calling for a strike. It is clear that everyone at BMC is proud of the care they provide, how they place patients first, and how they have supported nursing throughout the years.

*Amanda Oberlies*

Amanda Stefancyk Oberlies PhD, MBA, RN  
Chief Executive Officer  
Organization of Nurse Leaders, MA, RI, NH and CT