



Snohomish County

County Council

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To Providence Hospital Leadership,

We, the undersigned, are collectively writing to express our disappointment and share our concerns with Providence leadership's handling of the staffing crisis amongst nurses. This staffing crisis is a public health issue and it's directly impacting the community we serve. We respect that the decisions made by leadership are difficult ones and that there are not always simple solutions. With that in mind, we hope to outline some of the specific issues which have been brought forward to elected officials as well as some potential actions which might work toward a resolution.

Some of the most prominent issues brought to our attention include the following:

- Nurses are severely understaffed and understaffing or short staffing continues to worsen. This includes examples of less than half-staffing in units like Labor & Delivery despite staffing ratio standards. This is causing significant burnout amongst overworked nurses and a decreased quality of care for patients.
- Nurses are being floated to work in other units in which they have no prior experience.
- There is increased fear of harm to patients as well as losing licensing if mistakes are made in areas without proper training or experience.
- Morale is very low amongst nurses and support staff and administration does not appear to be taking steps to boost morale. When patients become rightfully frustrated with a reduced quality of care, that frustration is taken out on nurses.
- Exit interview data has not been collected by leadership following nurse resignations, of which there have been a significant number. New efforts to reinstate this practice are welcome and should be the standard practice.
- Wages and benefits do not reflect the critical work being done by nurses. At the same time, the CEO's salary has been raised. Nurse wages should meet or exceed industry standards.

- Turn over rates are higher than the industry standard. Focus needs to be on new efforts for retention.
- Inductions or procedures for high-risk patients have been delayed or canceled. During labor, this could potentially result in serious harm to either the mother or the infant, including death.
- Patients in labor have been told to travel elsewhere in the region for Labor & Delivery care.
- Leadership made the decision to close the Pediatric Unit entirely.
- The Labor & Delivery unit has had to transfer admitted patients and divert triage patients unexpectedly due to lack of staffing, forcing patients to travel to other cities for acute care.
- The perception exists that in the decision-making process, leadership has prioritized profits above the well-being of patients, staff, and the community at large.
- Nurses have been leaders in initiating improvements to the staffing crisis, but the hospital leadership has taken no new action to address it nor has taken any new action to improve patient safety and access to healthcare for members of the community.
- Nurses do not feel that they are being heard by leadership. In addition, there is a feeling that realistic solutions have not been proposed or discussed.

The following are some potential actions which could work toward a resolution:

- Meet in good faith with the nurses to hear them out on their concerns as well as ideas for how to improve the quality of care for patients.
- Advocate for funding or regulatory changes in state law which might assist in addressing staffing issues. Solicit your partners in local government to include these same items in their legislative advocacy efforts.
- Reinstate the practice of collecting exit interview data following nurse resignations in order to make improvements and inform future staffing-related decisions. We further encourage efforts to collect this information from the past year for previous resignations.
- Start at the top when savings need to be made, such as eliminating pay raises for high-level leadership in order to shift the focus toward competitive wages and benefits for nurses.
- Provide incentives for nurses, such as hazard pay or a retention bonus.
- Enter into early contract negotiations with the nurses' union in order to arrive at a mutually-agreeable path forward to address the current staffing crisis.
- Once significant changes have been put into practice, make a good faith effort to reinstate nurses who had resigned over workplace issues.

Providence Hospital's mission statement is to provide "compassionate service, particularly for the poor and vulnerable." This is an admirable mission which ought to be prioritized in decision-making. We encourage Providence Hospital Leadership to take the above concerns and potential actions into consideration. Failing to improve working conditions and improve staffing will increase morbidity and even mortality of patients. We stand ready to assist in any way we can. An update on what leadership is currently doing to address staffing issues would be welcomed. Providence Hospital has been a

community asset which provides valuable services to the residents of Snohomish County and beyond. It is our hope that by working toward a resolution of the current staffing crisis, Providence can continue to lead the way in healthcare and the delivery of quality care to patients. Each of us, the County, Providence, and the nursing staff, share the same mission of providing compassionate service for our community and we appreciate your immediate attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

Megan Dunn
Council Chair

Jared Mead
Council Vice-Chair

Sam Low
Councilmember

Nate Nehring
Councilmember

Strom Peterson
Councilmember

cc: Everett City Council