

## President's Message

By HealthCare-PSEA President Sandi Zubek, RN

### IT'S TIME TO INVEST IN THE WELL-BEING OF HEALTH CARE WORKERS

I don't know about you, but the past two years of working through the pandemic seem longer than my decades of nursing before COVID-19.

Wave upon wave of overloaded emergency room patients and regular units are sometimes closed to shift staff because of patient overload. We are pulled in so many directions that I can't think straight, much less provide high-quality attention to my sick and suffering patients.

Maybe you watched helplessly on Facetime as a patient gasped their last breath while talking to their loved ones as you held the phone. We all have horrible, unbelievably sad, infuriating experiences and memories that will never go away. Long after the pandemic ends, it will leave us to cope with the emotional, physical, and professional scars left behind.

The pandemic caused situations where compromises were made, and decisions were forced upon medical workers which produced morally indefensible conditions that are appalling, horrifying, and

indescribably sad. It can leave you drained and anxious because those feelings become increasingly difficult to swallow as you try to show an agreeable attitude around patients and colleagues. Keeping your sense of hope and optimism in such terrible circumstances is a tall challenge. Here are a few words that capture the meaning and implications of these things: burnout, compassion fatigue, moral injury, and much more.

HealthCare-PSEA is made up of our local unions, and we also belong to the AFT HealthCare organization on the national level. This past summer several members listened to a moving and disturbing presentation by Kelly Trautner, senior director of AFT Health Issues, about nurses' working conditions and patient care. Let me say that we could only nod our heads in agreement and share our troubling stories that were confirmed within her report. We all have these experiences but realizing first-hand that we are not alone in our workplaces around the state, nation, and world is terrifying, but

reassuring at the same time.

Make sure to read Terry Myers' article in this issue of *Pulse* which accurately summarizes the many insights presented by Senior Director Trautner. Please use what you learn or more accurately, what you'll recognize based on your experiences, to help improve the healing and support that we can provide each other, and equally important, to ourselves.

I'm proud to report that AFT HealthCare will continue to support us at the national level within the health care industry. They will ensure nurses' perspectives and experiences are increasingly used to inform and shape new policies combatting and reducing moral injury, compassion fatigue, and other awful things holding us back and overwhelming our profession.

Please know that we are here for each other. Never lose sight of the fact that we are tough, experienced, and damn good at what we do. Thank you for all you do, and please keep safe as we get through these ongoing challenging times.

# Our national affiliate provides presentation “Bracing for the Future of Nursing”

By Terry Myers, HealthCare-PSEA executive committee member

**A**t the annual executive committee meeting of HealthCare-PSEA, we were joined via Zoom by Kelly Trautner, senior director from our national union, AFT Healthcare. Trautner presented a moving, difficult program on the severe challenges currently facing nursing today and into the next decade.

Members earned a contact hour toward their continuing education requirements. The AFT Healthcare facilitated the recording and reporting of those hours. It's another example of the kind of opportunities and quality services you receive as a member of HealthCare-PSEA's local, state, and national unions

Trautner's report rang uncomfortably true. Strikingly, while the pandemic has certainly made things even worse, most of the excruciating challenges confronting nurses today were in abundance even before COVID-19 emerged, based on the results of the report. The information was based on a large nationwide nurses' survey from 2019 as well as on data reported by other sources.

## Key findings included:

- \* Only 44% of nurses rate their health as good.
- \* 45% of nurses surveyed reported burnout.
- \* Suicide among nurses is double that of the general

population.

- \* Female nurses are 70% more likely to die from suicide than physicians.
- \* Nurses and patient care assistants experience the highest rate of violence of any occupation.
- \* 80% of critical care nurses experienced verbal abuse at least once in the past year; almost half recalled physical abuse and discrimination.

Beyond these not entirely surprising results, which the pandemic only worsened, Trautner continued to explore the ways in which nurses are under increasing pressure and have always been at risk for bullying, burnout, and incivility.

- **Bullying:** repeated, unwanted, harmful actions meant to humiliate, offend, and inflict distress.

- **Burnout:** emotional exhaustion, cynicism/apathy, low sense of personal accomplishment.

- **Incivility:** rude, discourteous, disrespectful actions regardless of intent.

The consequences are related to poor patient outcomes, high turnover rates, increased costs, clinician illness, and suicide.

**Major causes include large workload, staff shortages, extended shifts, skills and preparation mismatch, and the documentation burden.**

The average cost to hire and train a new RN is \$44,400.

Clearly, nurses face a high risk of mental health issues, particularly anxiety and depression. Social isolation, witnessing large numbers of deaths, increased patient acuity, uncertainty of care protocols, staffing shortages, lack of appropriate PPE, and anger at families and patients who believe the disease is a hoax, add to the risk.

What, then, can be done to start helping to dig out of this hole into which far too many nurses fall, especially of late? How do we begin to stem the tide of turnover, early retirement, frustration, despair, and anxiety? **The answer is that the health care industry needs to invest in the well-being of nurses and health care workers.**

NAM (National Academy of Medicine) defines well-being “as the experience of positive perceptions and the presence of constructive conditions at work and beyond that enables workers to thrive and achieve their full potential.”

***The ability to face adverse situations, remain focused, and continue to be optimistic for the future.*** This ability is described as a “vital characteristic” for nurses in the complex health care system.

Our work is not easy, and none of us can attain better working conditions alone, which is why it's important to belong to HealthCarePSEA.

# News from HealthCare-PSEA Locals

## Bucks County Nurses Association

**By Bonnie Neiman, PSEA UniServ Representative**

The BCNA's first Zoom meeting was held on Nov. 9. Among the many topics discussed during the meeting were the results of the members' survey. The survey showed nurses are experiencing an emotional impact from the pandemic. The biggest areas of concern are the heavy workloads, uncertain return to normalcy, and employee burnout. BCNA will be looking for ways to lift the spirits of its members. The results were also shared with administration, with the goal of encouraging them to offer more support to nurses.

Neshaminy Manor is the worksite for the majority of the BCNA members. Management held three town hall meetings on Nov. 10 for employees to voice their concerns to supervisors regarding the staffing shortages and its impact to employee morale. All the attending parties recognized wage increases would help boost morale but it's not likely to occur. The union and administration are also exploring the possibility of 12-hour shifts for nurses.

## Highlands Hospital Nurses Association and Lab Technicians

**By Maria Degnan, PSEA UniServ Representative**

The Highlands Hospital Nurses and Lab Techs continue to be very busy treating patients from Fayette County and surrounding areas. They work tirelessly to assist patients with all different types of ailments while continuing to fight COVID-19 and prevent its spread.

In addition to providing patient care and support, the local officers reached a tentative agreement that was ratified by membership and the hospital. Highlights include: one-year agreement until Dec. 31, 2022, a \$1.25/hour raise at all levels, no changes to health care insurance, an expansion of seniority language to allow people to return to the bargaining unit for 90 days and maintain seniority, expansion of per diem language to extend the 24-hour cap on the premium wage to the end of a shift, and added language for quarterly meetings between the local leaders and the hospital administration.

In September 2021, Highlands Hospital celebrated its 130th anniversary. It remains one of the few independent hospitals in the state operating as a non-profit entity with 71 patient beds. Our members are proud of the work that they do to help the residents of the area maintain the availability of quality health care services in the community.

## Somerset Professional Nurses Association

**By Tim Tuinstra, HealthCare-PSEA UniServ Representative**

Somerset's nurses continued to monitor and extend various incentive pay and flexible staffing arrangements as needed during the ongoing pandemic. The staffing arrangements are for very limited duration, on a case-to-case basis. And, it is stated in writing by the parties that these are not permanent or regular ways of operating. It's part of the cooperation between the nurses and administration to meet the needs as the situation evolves.

Earlier this year the union received sad news that former local president Bill Carnell passed away in a traffic accident. Current president Casey Brown and I attended his family's touching memorial service. The local and HealthCare-PSEA each sent flowers to the family.

Members, officers, and I gathered on Dec. 9 for the annual Christmas party, which also served as one of the required general membership meetings for the local.

The event was held at the Italian Oven outside Somerset. It featured a little bit of union work and was long on hospitality and holiday cheer.

## Indiana Registered Nurses Association

**By Tim Tuinstra, HealthCare-PSEA UniServ Representative**

The Indiana Registered Nurses Association (IRNA) now has a full officer roster. Additionally, they are working hard on building up IRNA's representative group and welcoming volunteers to join the group because more help will be needed.

Over the course of the fall and early winter, the union and hospital continued to work on and extend various incentive programs to retain and recruit more nurses. This includes some nurses earning up to \$50 more on certain shifts. As the pandemic continues to evolve, officers and union staff will continue advocating on behalf of the members with administration.

Finally, Indiana Regional Medical Center instituted a vaccine mandate per the federal government and court decisions requiring this. As of this writing, most nurses received their vaccinations, and others had been granted medical or religious exemptions on a case-by-case basis.

*Pulse* is a publication for health care members  
of the Pennsylvania State Education Association  
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The 45th Constitutional Convention  
of the Pennsylvania AFL-CIO will  
take place on Tuesday, March 29-31,  
in the Grand Ball Room of the  
Omni William Penn Hotel,  
Pittsburgh.

HealthCare-PSEA's affiliation with  
the PA AFL-CIO allows us to send  
five delegates to the convention to  
participate in the constitutional and  
resolution process.

