

Sutter Coast nurses voice concerns

April 24, 2022



Nurses at Sutter Coast Hospital in Crescent City went on strike Monday morning after contract negotiations stalled on the issues of safe staffing levels, protective equipment in the post-pandemic environment and employee benefits.

“There’s not enough full-time nurses,” according to Andrea Weaver, an emergency room nurse. In her unit, approximately 50 percent of the nurses are full-time. “Sometimes there’s only one full-time nurse per shift,” she said.

The gap is filled by the use of “travelers” – nurses who work under three-month contracts before moving on to other assignments at different hospitals.

Travelers, Weaver said, are required to have only one year of experience as a registered nurse, and are permitted to “self-report” their level of experience without independent verification. Many “have no E.R. experience.”

The shortage of full-time experienced nurses has resulted in reassignments that placed less experienced travelers in assignments that require more experience.

“Charge nurses are taking on patient assignments,” said Amber Foust, an intensive care unit nurse. “Some travelers then take on the charge nurse assignment.”

Workplace violence issues are also emerging. Del Norte County does not have an in-patient mental health facility.

“We are holding mental health patients in the E.R. for days to weeks sometimes,” Weaver said. Some mental health patients “have attempted to assault nurses while they were on duty.”

A flyer produced by the California Nurses Association and distributed by the striking nurses in Crescent City, states that Sutter Health nurses seek to “ensure transparency around Sutter’s personal protective equipment stockpile” and ensure that Sutter continues to invest in PPE “to keep nurses and health care workers, as well as our patients safe.”

A Sutter Health spokesperson, in a prepared message, stated that CNA’s work stoppages “at 18 of our sites – even for a single day – require complex and costly preparation, and obligate us to make plans that our teams, patients and community can rely on.” The spokesperson stated that “contracted workers” will be placed “where needed” during the work stoppage.

The prepared message also stated that Sutter Health has “scoured the global supply chain amid worldwide shortages to secure more than 165 million pieces of PPE, including masks, isolation gowns and face shields,” for patients and health care providers and patients “to maintain an adequate supply.”

Nurses have been working without a contract since June 2021, according to Weaver, who is on the bargaining team for the nurses.