

HPAE Local 5112

at *Runnells Specialized Hospital*

December 2015

Letter from the Acting President

Season's Greetings! What a year! It was full of uncertainty, challenges, highs and lows. This year I celebrate becoming a mommy to a healthy baby girl, standing in as acting president, and our local achieving a renewed union contract with Union County. All of the fore mentioned tasks were not easy feats. But, all have their rewards. Years end, usually, lead us to reflect on accomplishments, failures, and making new resolutions for the coming year. I would require each member to do more. Know your contract and advocate for yourselves. Knowledge is power. Being your own activist is empowering (we do it for our patients all the time). Being an active union member is powerful.

I pray, this coming year, as we all reap the benefits of retroactive back pay, longevity bonuses, experience step increases, uniform allowance, paid ANA membership, increased tuition and education stipends that you are ALL moved to action. I pray that your "no" become "yes, I will help." I pray that each RN will take full advantage of their contract and attend one HPAE Education Day, conference or event. I pray the question, "When are we getting our money?" is replaced with "What can I do to make this a stronger union?" I pray, when new contracts are received in the mail that they are read and become a living, working document. Finally, I pray we respect, listen to one another and feel valued for our various talents and gifts. Have a Happy and Healthy New Year

Acting President Local 5112
Priscilla Surlles-Burrus

Thanks to All....and Try This Recipe!

It is hard to believe it has been a year since the end of Runnells Specialized Hospital and the beginning of Cornerstone Behavioral Health. We are no longer the old staff and the new staff; we are the current staff. It has been a year of learning and growing.

I would like to take a moment to talk about the wonderful group of people I have the privilege to work with. I have witnessed numerous acts of kindness and generosity from this staff. They have donated clothing and toiletries to our patients, many of whom come through the front door with nothing more than the clothes on their backs. They have also provided food treats for them.

This past Halloween we had a party for our patients. We brought chips, dip, soda, and cupcakes. It was amazing to see almost all of them out of their rooms socializing with the staff and each other. They enjoyed themselves and were grateful. There were a few requests for the recipe for the Buffalo Chicken dip that was served. So...here it is. Enjoy!

- 2-10 ounce cans chunk chicken, drained
- 2-8 ounce packages of cream cheese
- 1 cup Ranch dressing
- ¾ cup hot sauce
- 1 package of shredded cheddar cheese

Place all ingredients in a crockpot. Serve when hot and cheeses are melted.



HAPPY HOLIDAYS HPAE LOCAL 5112 MEMBERS

We made it to this point, one year since the change occurred. Can you believe it? Did we cross the finish line yet? I am glad you asked. The answer is no. There are still challenges ahead. There are many uphill's and downhill's and many more valley to step into, but together we can make it if we unite as "one." Yes, we can do it if we start with putting one foot ahead of the other and keep moving forward. The future belongs to each of us. May the New Year bring you peace that passes all understanding for a brighter tomorrow?

Elaine

HPAE. Putting care first.

A MESSAGE FROM ANN TWOMEY, HPAE PRESIDENT

Free Speech Is Not Always Free in the Workplace



Unless you have a union, the fundamental principle of free speech can end at the door of your workplace. For non-union workers, any form of communication, including bringing legitimate issues to the public, is often met by threats or punishment through harsh and

sometimes illegal policies limiting speech.

More and more companies, including healthcare companies, are creating policies that limit their workers' speech. Sometimes that speech is private between co-workers or friends; sometimes it becomes public, through protest, whistle blowing or social media. Workplace policies are becoming increasingly restrictive, though protecting our free speech rights – even our right to complain – should be fundamental. It is particularly vital in health care, since limiting a healthcare professional's rights to speak up about unsafe condition can have a detrimental impact not only on the worker, but on the patients and quality of services provided.

Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter and other forms of social media have become the way in which many of us express our opinions, as well as share our family news. More than two-thirds of Americans use social media sites. Globally, Twitter has 230 million active users, posting 500 million Tweets a day – while more than 70 % of all USA internet users are on Facebook.

As a result, the conflict between an employer's attempt to protect its reputation and an employee's right to speak up is being fought in these very public arenas. In New Jersey, counties, school districts and private employers have disciplined workers for their use of social media – and have also been sued by their employees for actions taken against their social media use. There are hundreds of law firms and consultants advertising and interpreting the law on what is and is not allowed within employer social media policies.

Recently, Registered Nurses at Meridian Health leafleted the community, addressed town councils, posted billboards and used social media like Facebook and Twitter to press for safe staffing levels in their workplace contract. Nurses posted pictures of themselves holding signs with messages like "Nurses Keep Patients Safe".

The posts didn't go over well with Meridian managers who told nurses that the posts violated the hospital's social media policy. Overly broad and unreasonable restrictions on speech such as these policies could have had a chilling effect, stopping nurses from speaking up when they believed patient care is compromised, or when staffing levels are unsafe.

The hospital's reaction wasn't unique, but because the nurses' were unionized, it didn't end there. HPAE nurses found that the hospital's social media policy was filled with language violating nurses' rights and they filed a complaint with the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), the federal agency that oversees workplace rights. In a series of recent decisions, the NLRB has found company social media policies unlawful because they interfere with employees' right to act collectively, which are protected acts under the National Labor Relations Act.

It's important for workers to know the limits of their rights, and the extent to which their employers will search their personal social media accounts. Many employers continue to attempt limiting social media in an effort to censor postings they just don't like. And that should be unacceptable to all of us.

As part of their contract settlement, Meridian Health agreed to bargain with HPAE over the social media policy so that it no longer violates employee rights. Without their union, both the voice of nurses and of patients would have been unprotected.

Nurses and healthcare workers know it is essential to protect the privacy rights of their patients in their communications, and to refrain from harmful or discriminatory speech. They don't want to harm their employers – but they do want solutions to unsafe staffing levels, or unsafe working conditions.

Instead of banning speech, I suggest hospitals listen to their nurses and health professionals, and seek solutions to the problems they raise.

Ann Twomey
President HPAE