



Message from the President—COVID-19

This newsletter was supposed to highlight negotiations 2020 and educate our membership on a potential new contract!! Our local executive board and negotiation team spent countless hours planning for a successful 2020 contract campaign. We were supposed to start negotiations in March 2020 in hopes of presenting a new contract to the membership by the expiration date of May 31st, 2020!! Instead we held an emergency meeting on March 13th to work out a contract extension agreement with the employer. We strongly felt that we were going to need all hands-on deck to deal with the Covid-19 crisis and we could not give negotiations 2020 the careful attention they deserve! We agreed to extend the contract on a month by month basis until the immediate crisis of the Covid-19 lifted. We NEVER could have imagined that we would be in the fight of our lives!! I never in my 35 years of nursing have been so horrified to be a nurse and at the same time so proud to be a nurse. The last few months have had a profound impact on me, and I am positive I am not alone!! I have never been so proud of my profession and my union and at the same time felt so helpless and ineffective! This virus has taught all of us many things but what stands out the most is that we as nurses and union members NEED each other for all the reasons that I do not even need to mention. Thank you! Thank you for standing together as a local and as registered nurses to protect those who care!

Our present contract is still in effect despite what several misinformed supervisors/managers have said!! Believe me-- it has been a daily BATTLE to let our employer know we will push back and challenge any contract violations and we as a union will support and defend our members right to have proper PPE and a safe and healthy work environment. We WILL propose retro raises and I am sure the agonizing events of the last few month will have an overpowering effect on negotiations 2020! The employer just recently requested to meet virtually to figure out how to resume negotiations safely in our "new normal". The employer is thinking "late June"? No rest for the weary! We as a Local need to find a way to pick ourselves up and dust off the horror of the last few months and let the employer know that we DO MATTER!! Our safety matters-our mental health matters-our licenses matter-our families matter! STAY connected! Join our secret FB page (ask a coworker to invite you) Make sure your contact information is update at HPAE.org under "member resources". Visit HPAE.org for a very comprehensive Covid-19 resource page.

Things we have addressed as a Local! (In no particular order)

- *PPE shortage
- *Ever changing rules regarding PPE and Isolation
- *exposures (over 250+)
- *shift rotations
- *denial of unemployment
- *Team nursing
- *work reduction Cardiac rehab, Infusion center, CNS Intake, HCC, MC, MCH (sorry if I missed anyone)
- *hotline issues
- *reassignment to other facilities
- *visitation policy changes
- *OSHA complaint!!! Investigation under way!!
- *Fake PPE KN95
- *testing of patients and nurses (lack of)
- *quarantine
- *staffing
- *reprocessing/Decon of N95's
- *MASC temporary closure
- *poor and confusing communication
- *issues with environmental services
- *homemade masks
- *reopening of elective procedures
- *Fit testing (lack of)
- *reassignments!!!
- *workers comp issues
- *opening satellite ICU's
- *safety agents
- *masking of all employees

Lastly UNION PROPOSED BONUSES/HERO PAY in our last emergency Covid-19 related bargain session AND.....Virtua flat out rejected all of our proposal!! They have the money they just do not want you on the frontline to have it!!

My heartfelt thanks to ALL of you!!!

Sheryl Mount
President

HPAE Face Shields and Lawn signs!!

We have had great success with our HPAE concerted activity of honoring our members on the frontline by delivering HPAE lawn signs! If you still have not received your sign or need a sign please reach out to anyone on Local 5105 executive board! Also-we have had several face shield handouts but do plan on having more events to give out HPAE face shields! Look for us at the employee entrance! BELOW: Member Lora Carberry RN SCN showing off her PPE during face shield hand out at Mount Holly Moose!



Documenting Your Exposures

Well, these past months have been nothing short of hellacious for our members working the frontline! If we have not been taking care of extremely sick patients, we have been sick, or taking care of family members who have gotten sick with COVID-19 illness. Life has been a time for introspection and reflection while we consider our priorities.

At the beginning of this mess, as we noticed people having exposures which could lead to future health issues, we saw, just like everything else Virtua does, that there was absolutely no plan in place to trace contacts of COVID positive patients and staff and therefore no alert system to stop the flow of contamination. We asked for a plan. We asked for transparency. We shared our concerns. Nothing. So, we decided to do something about it.

Our Local created their own tracking system which has proved to be the key to not only supporting our OSHA complaint but helping protect and support our members. You know the saying, "If you want it done, you better do it yourself!" (Sheryl Mount!) A big part of our local's tracking system is stressing the importance of filling out an incident report when an exposure occurs: an INCIDENT REPORT is a MUST! Also, all possible harms to employees are legally supposed to be recorded in the OSHA 300 log. These incident reports should trigger our employer to log all COVID related exposures in this OSHA 300 report. If they do not---we have the incident report to prove exposure!! A COVID-19 exposure is definitely considered a harm or potential harm to an employee. If you are not sick from the exposure that is great but what if someone you come into contact with gets sick because you are an asymptomatic carrier? What if you are not sick yet because it is the prodromal period (before symptoms appear)?

For example, you have the bare minimum questionable PPE (toilet paper mask or KN95 you were not fit tested for) that the employer provided and you go into a r/o COVID room because the patient looks like they could crash. You know the patient had 2 negative COVID swabs, but your nursing instincts are telling you that this patient will be intubated by the end of your shift. You took care of this patient all day with inadequate PPE. Come to find out your nursing instinct were right-- the patient came back positive after being tested the third time. Sadly- you find out from your coworkers and not your employer!! Your employer did not have your back!! Your coworkers did!! That is an exposure. Lastly, the incident report you filed is your backup information for any possible legal and/or medical issues such as Worker's Compensation and any other exposure related issues. Do you want to be responsible for possible future expenses related to something caused by the workplace? No, Me neither.

What about HIPAA-- how does it relate to protecting patient privacy while protecting public health? This question was asked of me many times. Our advice is to always follow all HIPAA laws but giving someone a heads up that they have had a potential exposure while adhering to HIPAA is possible. In giving the heads up to a coworker regarding potential exposures you do not give out personal patient information. Do not send identifying details via text or email or anything electronic. An incident report with the date, approximate time exposed and PPE you were using (if any) is sufficient. I strongly suggest keeping your own private work diary with no personal patient information on it for future reference.

Lastly, if you have questions or concerns please reach out to any one of us. I know I sound like a broken record, but I really do want to record all exposures or potential exposures -Why? Because we as a local want to support and protect our members. I have found many times an exposure occurred, and I was able to see that multiple people were involved with the same scenario who did not even realize it! The employer missed contacting people who had exposures that we caught because our members are educated, informed and diligent about making sure no one is missed. We are more than just ourselves. We are our family, our friends, our colleagues. We are all HPAE!!

You guys are the BEST!! (do not tell my kids)

Beth

CNS Update

In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, home care has been adjusting to this evolving climate. This has led to constantly changing plans and procedures. There have been many communication breakdowns, and many of us have been wondering what the latest update is. We all want to be as safe as possible while continuing to care for our patients, and these constant changes have made this exceedingly difficult. We have also been led to believe that because of the pandemic, management has the right to supersede our contract, this is not true. Our contract still stands and should be followed. We should be contacted if this is not the case so the union can take appropriate action. We are always stronger when we are united. Thank you for all you continue to do, stay strong, and be safe.

Kelli Zambetti Frazer VP CNS
Susan Lanis Grievance Chair CNS

A Letter from your Grievance Chair

First and foremost – I want to say I see you! We, the union, see you! We acknowledge and look in awe of the heroic contributions you have all made over the past several months and continue to during this Covid -19 Pandemic.

Despite the distress and anxiety of being reassigned daily from my department (Cath Lab) I have to say it was my privilege to get to work with and meet many of you throughout the hospital. I ended up working as a Team nurse, Safety Agent, Infection Control Personnel and taking assignments on 3 NW ICU overflow over the past 9 weeks all while covering the Cath lab for Emergent STEMI'S. In doing so, I got to see a day in the life of many of you that I do not get to see being in a specialty department now.

- I saw the war zone of the ED triaging and caring for the non-stop influx of Covid-19 patients and was so impressed by the teamwork and streamline processes they all came up with to just keep their heads above water some days.
- I saw the barriers of the med surg nurses taking care of confused, hypoxic, positive Covid patients behind closed doors, making that seconds only split decision how do I get my PPE on and protect myself and get into that room in time to prevent my patient from climbing out of bed and hitting the floor?
- I took an assignment on the “clean “ICU overflow floor only to find out days later – well that might not have been a clean patient after all.
- I shared the sadness and tears working alongside the amazing ICU crew as the death toll rose, when every room was a positive vented Covid patient fighting for their life. Being one of the last people these patients had contact with before they succumb to this virus.
- Long days in PPE, sweating in plastic gowns, make shifting nose dressing for skin breakdown, and worrying for the safety of ourselves and our families.
 - Will I have enough PPE when I come in tomorrow.
 - Can I safely squeak out one more day with my mask? Is this mask really the right fit? What is that smell? oh a reprocessed N95, hum is that safe? I have been in this Covid positive room for over an hour now, how much more can I get done before I have to go in my other Covid room for the same amount of time.

- Counting down the time until the end of the shift- only to go home and worry about your documentation, getting home immediately going into decon mode as to not infect the family.

This has been a war zone ladies and gentlemen, and I salute you. The professionalism, comradery and activism has been outstanding. It has been a daily struggle with fight for collaboration and solidarity for safe working environment, adequate and effective PPE, and job security. Who would have thought that staff would be forced to stay home during a pandemic? No hero pay, threats of discipline for insubordination and refusal to work when concerns were voiced of patient and staff safety? Daily feelings of lack of support, anxiety of the unknown and the lack of information given. Daily changes to policy and protocol. Actual discipline for not being a “Team Player” Denials of unemployment for closed departments and cancelled staff, unfair forced usage of PTO for HET to “save the budget”. Fighting for quarantine pay and testing. All this while performing our high stress duty as a nurse, to save lives and care for the sick.

As I said, I see you, the Union Sees you! You have all brought compassionate competent care to disaster response despite the increased risk to self. While this was a challenge, we all came together and supported one another, team nursing at its finest. Solidarity, we are all in this together. HPAE has been there for you and continues to fight for you during this crisis. You have been more than flexible as a supportive staff during this crisis and attempts of management to stretch the CBD.

You all must continue to remain vigilant about professional, ethical, and legal protection when asked to provide care in such high-risk situations such as the Covid-19 Pandemic. Organizational support for front line workers during this Pandemic is a non-negotiable necessity. And we stand by you –holding up the frontline with you - Union Strong.

Stay Safe, Healthy and Union Strong.

Yours in Solidarity,
Bonnie Terwilliger, RN~BSN
HPAE Local 5105 Grievance Chair

Voting Safely during Covid-19

With so much uncertainty in our lives right now, worrying about voting and doing it safely is probably pretty low on the list of your priorities. Thankfully, voting by mail is the simple and safe way to make your voice heard. These ballots can be filled out in the safety and comfort of your home. In fact, I've been doing it for years since I work 12 hour shifts and I'm never certain I'll be able to make it to the polls on time. We are fortunate in NJ to have no excuse-absentee ballots, anyone can apply for one and no reason is needed.

Because of CoVID 19, this year's Primary Election has been postponed from June 2nd to July 7th. Per an executive order from the Governor, all party affiliated (e.g., Democrat or Republican) voters will receive postage paid mail-in ballots to be returned postmarked July 7th. If you are not affiliated, a mail- in ballot application will be mailed to you. There will also be at least 5 drop box locations in each county, and, if voting in person is important to you; each municipality is required to have at least one polling place open, following all CDC guidelines. Many of my co-workers know getting people to vote is a passion of mine and what could be easier than vote by mail? For those worried about a higher incidence of fraud with mail-in ballots, vote fraud is exceedingly rare. Despite any risks associated with voting by mail, it is still too vital to be restricted or discouraged. It gives a right to vote to groups who may not be able to cast an in-person ballot; those who work during normal voting hours, the elderly, those with mobility issues, and those who are immune compromised, all benefit from being able to vote at home, especially during this COVID-19 pandemic. The uncertainty I mentioned earlier still lingers over the General Election in November. Will we be experiencing the “second wave” of CoVID? Will the numbers be lower? Consider strongly filling out a vote by mail application. Even though NJ is sending out ballots to all for the Primary Election, it is not clear that that will guarantee a mail in ballot election for the General Election on November 2nd. Mail in ballot info can be found at <https://nj.gov/state/elections/index.shtml>. I hope everyone is staying safe, here's to voting safe, too.

In solidarity,
Melody Schantz, COPE co-chair, Secretary/Treasurer

Member Article—Ronita Chamber's 3NE

Starting a new chapter as a new nurse is exciting and the options are endless in the nursing field. There are so many different paths you can take as far as specialties, levels of education, and various certifications. Passing your boards offer a sense of relief because passing the boards is the hardest part. Once you pass your boards everything else is a piece of cake. The next step is landing a job and after that it is orientation. Orientation is great because you have a preceptor who is there to teach you things that you might have not seen or experienced in nursing school. They are there to answer your questions, go over policies, and make the transition from student to a new nurse a little easier. There are no such things as “dumb questions” and if you have a gut feeling that something does not seem right with your patient do not hesitate to get another nurse for their opinion. It is okay to be nervous during orientation and no one expects you to know everything on your first day. Nursing School stresses the concept of teamwork and that is very pertinent when it comes to working in the medical field. Of course, you will need help from other nurses however your team should also include the following staff members: Patient Care Technicians, Observers, and other departments such as Respiratory Therapists, the Laboratory, or the Pharmacy for example. Your nursing professors were telling the truth when they say, “whatever you don't learn here in school you will learn on the job as a nurse”. Just remember that every shift will not be easy, ask questions if you do not understand something, and always be a team player and you will be able to get through anything that will come your way.

Being only one month off of orientation I am still getting the hang of the unit and honing in my time management skills. There are times where I have to keep reminding myself that I am not perfect and there will be times I will not know the answers to every question and that is okay. When I first started on my own my mental To-Do List checklist would have my thoughts running a mile a minute and I would run around the unit like a chicken with no head. Now, I do one task at a time and I am quite sure I have become a professional at providing cluster care. Working during a pandemic is very scary to say the least. But remembering that I can rely on the other team members on the unit makes it a little easier because they are on the front line just like me. Having the opportunity to work for a hospital that has a Union is also comforting because there are policies and procedures put in place to make sure the members of the union are protected and treated equally.

If I could give any advice it would be to keep an open mind when it comes to working with others with various personalities. Understanding that there may be times that you will not get along with others is natural is okay but keeping the patients in mind and providing the best patient care you can, should be the priority. Working as a new nurse with no prior patient care experience the transition from being a student nurse to a new nurse has definitely been a bumpy road but it is all worth it when your patients thank you for your hard work and dedication to taking care of them. Nursing is not an easy career field and it definitely comes with its challenges but when you look at the benefits that are also involved the pros outweigh the cons. For example, there's job security, various levels of education, and specialties to work in. Keeping an open mind allows you to be a blank canvas and absorb all the necessary tips and tricks when it comes to providing patient care. Working together with the other team members on your unit will make the shift go by easier and also finish tasks faster than you could alone. There is no such thing as “dumb questions” and do not hesitate to get a second opinion about a situation you are unsure of. Lastly, having a positive attitude is very contagious and you will be surprised what small deeds can impact someone's day.