

Straight Talk

A weekly update from management on the issues that matter most



January 11, 2008

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

Yesterday, the SEIU held a press conference in Naples to announce that it had filed a complaint, charging NCH with, among other things, “intimidation, threats,” and generally discouraging communication about union representation.

We are reviewing the allegations, evaluating them for truth and significance, and will respond appropriately.

The SEIU is, of course, free to charge anything it likes.

But I do hope most of you recognize that throughout this union challenge, we have taken great pains to allow the process to proceed correctly, to follow the rules and do the right thing – all the while, remaining focused on what we do best, delivering quality patient care.

As to “discouraging communication,” just the opposite is the case.

This week, in fact, we completed another series of “*Around the Clocks*” with staff at all four locations, to receive suggestions, get feedback, and share information – including union-related news. Board Chairman Carl Westman and I followed the meetings with rounds one night at the downtown campus.

In terms of your concerns, expressed at this week’s sessions, I would summarize them this way.

◆ **Patient care and nursing** were issues on the minds of many.

Each year as our community swells with hundreds of thousands of vacationers and seasonals, we ramp up to handle the volume. This week, for example, we had a 27% increase in patient volume compared to the previous week.

To handle such volumes, last year we hired 284 nurses, nearly 20% more than 2006. In preparation for the “season,” an additional 170 nurses have been added this winter. We still have about 60 nurse positions opened among the 1,000 bedside nurses.

Despite our best efforts to meet the patient demand, both ERs get backed up with patients waiting for admission. I understand the stress of this and sincerely appreciate our caregivers’ understanding and willingness to cope with this increased demand.

◆ **Health insurance and related benefits** were another topic of interest.

Most of you appreciated the new benefit of having no deductible or co-pay when using an NCH facility. Some asked about policies when one’s provider doesn’t use an NCH facility. Others asked about Lee County, where the network is different and changing. I suggested directing such questions to HR for specific answers. We were also commended for fees for Wellness for full time employees and Edison students. I said we would address the fees charged to part-time seasonal employees.

◆ **Facilities suggestions** were offered by many in attendance. Among them:

- Renovate the North Naples surgical waiting room for families.
- Consider a non-smoking campus.
- Make employee mandates more subject specific.
- Install security cameras for NCH Central.
- Have an admission and discharge nurse during busy times.
- Place a patient ID tag on both the wrist and ankle so sleeping patients won’t be disturbed when identification is needed.
- Clean up back parking lots.
- Mitigate the diesel smell from EMS vehicles.
- Obtain more cooling blankets.
- Locate or obtain more IV pumps.
- Fix some ICU sinks’ automatic functions.

I assured those in attendance that all of these recommendations will be considered.

I regret that this *Straight Talk* has run a bit long. But I thought it important to share with you many of the topics discussed at the “*Around the Clocks*” to reassure you that, despite accusations to the contrary, we’re trying hard not only to “communicate” with you but, more important, to listen and act on your suggestions.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Allen".

Allen S. Weiss, M.D.
President and CEO