

RGH Nurses Decry Conditions Inside Hospital, Implore Administration to Listen to Nurses

(Rochester, NY) - Today, the Registered Nurses who are unionized with Rochester Union of Nurses and Allied Professionals (RUNAP) called on RGH's administration and executive leadership to fix the dire conditions inside the hospital for patients and staff and for them to meet their demands for a fair contract.

RUNAP leadership have been attempting to work with hospital management for months to negotiate a contract that would stop the bleeding of RNs from the facility, leaving patients vulnerable and without proper care. RUNAP and RGH came to the bargaining table in early October after the nurses won their union election in July 2022. They won despite an aggressive anti-union campaign by outside consultants, which diverted over one million dollars away from patient care.

“On any given day, our department runs on a fraction of the nurses needed to care for our patients safely,” said **Nicole Hancock, a nurse from a unit that cares for post-surgery patients.** “Our co-workers have left to work in facilities where they don't feel like they are putting their license on the line every shift they work. Despite what the administration says, we know there are hospitals where things are not this bad. Our travel nurses don't even want to renew their contracts because of how unsafe it is here.”

Recently provided vacancy rates show that most departments in the hospital are severely understaffed: **A unit specializing in cardiac care had a vacancy rate of 89%, while an ICU step-down unit that sees some of the sickest patients has a vacancy rate of 71%. The operating room has also lost the majority of its staff and has a vacancy rate of 56%, leading to significant delays in surgeries.** The emergency room where patients have been known to wait in chairs for days has a vacancy rate of 57%, meaning that more than half of the ER nursing staff is gone. **For each additional patient a nurse is assigned, the risk of in-hospital mortality increases by 12%; 60-day mortality by 7% and odds of readmission are increased by 7%. Due to policies like these, a patient at RGH is 87% more likely to suffer a central line associated bloodstream infection than in other New York state hospitals.**

“Rochester General Hospital is a story of disinvestment. It is a story of a management with a short-sighted view causing long-term problems. We have 7 local colleges with nursing programs. We have students who graduate wanting to stay in Rochester. And yet, Rochester General Hospital has a massive vacancy rate. There is no reason for this problem. The administration can choose to solve the Crisis by Listening to the Front-Line Experts – the nurses. They can invest in their skilled and committed staff. They can invest in Rochester,” **said Monroe County Legislator Susan Hughes-Smith.**

As a band aid to the chronic short staffing facing RGH, hospital management continues to spend outrageous amounts on travel nurse contracts instead of recruiting and retaining

its own staff nurses, even though there are seven nursing schools in the Rochester area. According to the Hospital's statements, RHH spent \$270 million on travel nurses in 2022, in comparison to \$13 million in 2018. As the second largest employer in Rochester, RHH's divestment from staff nurses hurts our local economy, as travel nurses take their paychecks and spend them elsewhere.

The travel nurses themselves have contracts in place that prevent dangerous practices RGH subjects its own nurses to. For example, up until yesterday, maternity nurses were being pulled off of their units to act as "helping hands" on adult floors, leaving their own patients in the hands of brand new nurses or travel nurses not equipped to handle complex situations.

"Experienced nurses being taken away from laboring patients is a disaster waiting to happen. Most of our patients are at moderate or high risk for a postpartum hemorrhage. A woman can bleed out in 4 minutes if not properly managed. Experienced nurses can mean the difference between life and preventable death," said **Labor and Delivery Nurse Gillian Kingsley**.

Lack of competitive pay at RGH is also driving nurses away and not just for agency jobs. "Nurses who train with us don't want to stay and take permanent jobs at RGH. Recently I asked a nursing student at the end of their rotation if she wanted to stay and work with us. She said she couldn't consider it because she had offers from other hospitals for \$10 more per hour.," concluded **Abby Rice, a Clinical Nurse Leader in the inpatient psychiatry unit at RGH**.

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