

# We remember our sister Heather

We lost a wonderful health care provider and dear friend and colleague recently.

Heather Desmarais was an RN in the ED, went back to school, obtained her master's degree, and continued in the ED as an ARNP. She was an active member in our union and was always supportive of our rights to bargain a fair contract and to have a strong voice in nursing practice. She also encouraged other workers to be involved and to join in our efforts to make Memorial a better place to work and care for patients. It is a terrible loss for our community and for those of us who loved her.

May her family and friends be comforted with memories of her sense of humor and her ability to make us feel valued and respected. Rest in peace dear friend; we will honor your life's accomplishments and forever miss your presence in our lives.



## United for Safety for Our Patients, Communities and Our Families

As frontline workers we are exposed each day to potential harm, but we have never seen a crisis as challenging as the COVID-19 outbreak. During this unprecedented time, our employer should put our safety first, so we have asked through negotiations for paid administrative leave if we are exposed to COVID-19.

However, VMMH doesn't believe they need to provide this form of relief since our state provides L&I and unemployment. Many of us have already experienced a higher amount of low census and some temporary reductions. Many of us have tested positive due to a workplace exposure but have not been able to access the benefits Memorial claims the state should provide us.

Simply put, VMMH should invest now in those who provide care.

## We're calling on VMMH to provide testing for staff and patients

With COVID-19 numbers increasing in Yakima County and our hospital preparing to reopen elective surgeries soon, we believe that testing for staff and patients should be a priority to ensure the safety of all. The limited number of testing kits the hospital receives makes this harder to accomplish, but with Virginia Mason as a partner, we're calling on administration to make more testing available.



"I work in IVCS and I was in the process of getting tested for COVID-19 a few weeks ago. One of the patients I was taking care of tested positive for COVID and I was having symptoms myself. I was tested on a Thursday and Employee Health called me Friday saying I tested negative, but I was still having symptoms so I was told to stay home until Monday. I was released back to work on Monday. I filed for L&I for those days I was off, and the next day L&I calls me saying that since I wasn't positive for COVID, that I wouldn't be reimbursed for those days I was off. People should be paid to quarantine – it is wrong how L&I claims are being DENIED and management thinks state benefits will cover my expenses while I had to quarantine when I was exposed at work."

**Jackie Larson, IV Conscious Sedation**



We need wages that recruit and retain

Our co-workers need to see real wage increases, and every one of us needs to be valued like the healthcare heroes the public says we are. VMMH presented a wage proposal at our last bargaining session that moves us backwards and does not address the recruitment and retention issues we have seen. Their proposal of one percent increase for the next two years – with some increases this year based off of 2019 wages – means that most of us, because of increases in minimum wage, will not see a meaningful wage increase. Without wages that recruit and retain, we will continue to see high turnover and we will lose highly experienced healthcare workers to other industries, such as nursing homes and grocery stores. We have all stepped up to the challenge and agree that providing hazard pay or appreciation incentives would go a long way in recognizing our hard work during this pandemic, but we have not seen this commitment from VMMH. It's time for hospital administration to support workers so we can continue fighting this crisis together.

Here is Memorial's less than adequate idea of how they will retain staff coming out of a pandemic:

Memorial Service wage proposal

Pay Grade	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Grade 5-6	9-12%	1%	1%
Grade 7	8%	1%	1%
Grade 8	8%	1%	1%
Grade 9	8%	1%	1%
Grade 10	4%	1%	1%
Grade 11	1% (151 workers in this paygrade!)	1%	1%
Grade 12-16	3%	1%	1%

\*The increases in year one are to adjust the scale for the minimum wage increase so our wage scale maintains real steps. But this is not enough! As Union members we are standing up for wages that will keep good workers on our team.

Memorial RN Wage proposal

\*Our employer failed to bring a wage proposal to the table and indicated they may retract the 2% increase they proposed in February. We are concerned that such a move may be in bad faith.



“This bargaining is about how our employer values those of us who give care. Whether it's decent wages for our caregivers, runners who support our efforts to care for COVID patients, and enough staff to deliver good safe care. Our current matrix was not designed for RNs to do total care. The expectation from management is that there will be no OT, no COVID runners and no missed breaks. The Shift Coordinators have always had the ability to request more staff through the Nursing Supervisor, but often get told, “I don't have anyone to send.” Management needs to accommodate for COVID runners as an expectation. The Shift Coordinators were busy before COVID and now they are essentially expected to be the runners, which then limit their availability to other staff and duties. Management accommodates for sick calls as a matter of routine. Runners are important. Staff are getting burned out. We need to plan for a surge with surgeries starting back and how we will retain staff. Now is not the time for Memorial to undercut real resources. We are the real resources here!” **Trish Bowman, RN 3EW**

Nurse retention is about respect and appreciation for our commitment to our patients and the risks we take



"We have finally returned to the bargaining table for RNs after an extended break. Administration still has not moved off of some of their takeaways. One big take away is our ability to convert sick hours into vacation. This is a big incentive for our senior nurses who don't use a lot of sick time and are rewarded by being able to convert it to vacation. They also no longer want us to have the ability to cash out 8 hours of vacation per pay period. They proposed up to 40 hours once a year, a take away of nearly 80%. Management has also retracted their previous wage proposal of 2% and will be offering something else this week. They indicated it could be less than they proposed before. We need to stand together and tell administration that a strong contract helps retain quality nurses and improve patient outcomes." **Tim Jennings, 1N RN**



“Since February we have been asking Memorial to provide Hazard Pay and Paid Admin Leave we even asked instead to have a 40 hour sick bank for which we can use if we get sick or have to quarantine. Their response was that members should access state benefits that it should be enough to supplement our time. Virginia Mason Memorial is thinking more like Walmart and their insistence that workers rely on the state. With all the other state benefits there are stipulations. Not everyone will be able to access state benefits if they apply. They're now telling employees that their positive COVID test is due to being community acquired. Yet we know of instances where a nurse has found out she cared for a positive patient and was never notified by Employee Health. They don't want to have any responsibility. What Memorial does not understand is by them not providing us any type of security during this pandemic we feel do not feel valued, we feel disposable. When we are asked to stay home, or if we are sent home it's on me to use my benefited time. We have a lot of pregnancy on our unit and most of the unit does not have a lot of vacation hours because of maternity leave. Our new employees have no accruals. Memorial should provide us with more economic security and if not people might be leaving us after this pandemic because they will remember how they were treated by their employer.” **Sandy Gaytan, Labor and Delivery Nurse**

Meaningful Increases for NACs, UCA's and Unit Secretaries



“If the hospital is concerned about RN turnover, they should really be concerned about NAC turnover. Yes, as nurses we can do total care. But having good NACs on our team is what makes our work sustainable. It provides the best care for our patients so they can feel clean and as comfortable as possible while they are with us. Offering NACs a 1% increase to their wages in years 2 and 3 of the contract will not help with retention. NACs are eyes and ears for nurses. If we're busy doing a med pass and we get new surgery patients, NACs usually see them first, get them weighed, check their vitals. When a caregiver calls me and says ‘Helen, come quick,’ I know my caregiver is seeing something important and I'm on my way. Management should have had the decency to come to the table with the same cost-of-living raises for our service workers as nurses.” **Helen Jensen, RN, 5E**

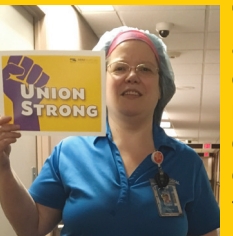


“I am a NAC, UCA and telemonitor tech, and many other NACs also function as all three. We do the job of many in one package and that's why we deserve a fair, meaningful raise. We play a crucial part in making patient care better and making sure this hospital is running well. For Memorial to invest more money into the Nurse Tech I and II positions is hurtful. There are limited people in these units and sooner or later these job classes will move out of the service unit and into the RNs or become a LPN. It seems like Memorial doesn't want to invest in the service unit because we aren't going to get hazard pay and they believe we are deserving of an ATB of 1%. Memorial should give their faithful and long-term employees a meaningful raise and invest in us!” **Brenda Ponce, 2EW NAC/UCA**



“When people come to Memorial from home care service or nursing homes, they a majority of the time take a \$2 pay cut. We are constantly losing people to work at the nursing homes or even to work at another minimum-wage job. Memorial is not retaining staff because of the low wages they have for NACs. As cost of living goes up, so does minimum wage and it seems like people who have been here 10ish years never see a raise. We proposed 5% so we can be competitive in the community and recruit and retain staff. We know we are 5% behind the community standards, and what management is proposing – 1% – will not suffice and people will leave.” **Alice Westphal, 3EW NAC/UCA**

EVS and Dietary deserve respect and dignity



“We work hard in the dietary department and we're proud to be the team that feeds our patients and our co-workers. If only management could appreciate us the way our doctors, nurses, caregivers do. Many of us have dedicated our lives to this facility, and what Memorial is telling us by offering 1% pay increase is they really don't care if their most experienced and loyal workers leave tomorrow. But what if we did? How well would our kitchens run, our rooms be cleaned, our patients be cared for, our co-workers trained, if we weren't here to support our newer staff and bring our experience with us to work every day? I say it's time we call on our community to support healthcare workers. Management may not care about our individual stories and our commitment, but I believe our patients and our communities do.” **Trish Lizotte, Dietary**



“We work hard in EVS to ensure the safety of our patients and our co-workers. Infection control is so important, more than ever during this pandemic. We deserve respect from administration. During our bargaining session I learned that we would not be seeing a wage increase this year, due to minimum wage increase to \$13.50. It's great our minimum wage increased in our state, but my workload has also increased and my pay hasn't changed.” **Joely Gonzalez, EVS**



“We are living in difficult times our kids are at home relatives are out of jobs. All the stress this pandemic bring to our life to all of us. Coming into work and wearing a mask all day long—following all the rules washing my hands even if you're not going into the ‘hot zones’—there's a cost to that, we are here every day getting expose going back home to our families in some cases even provided the proper PPE there is no reason for Virginia Mason Memorial not to invest in their Housekeepers. We keep the hospital clean it's humiliating to hear this administration have no respect for our work, for our dedication to good quality infection control prevention. We are asking management for hazard pay of a \$1.50 more per hour. “There's a physical and mental toll that takes on us all we are in the front line of pandemic we clean the COVID-19 rooms, we come here every day with our heart with passion for what we do because we want to provide the best quality patient care to our patients who come here. We know Yakima Virginia Mason Memorial is getting extra funds why not investing on us the workers, many of us invest years and years working here” **Celina Venegas, EVS**

Tell your friends and neighbors to support hospital workers: **Go to Keepmemorialsafe.org**