

“Letter from President Pam Neal”

The West Virginia Nurses Association proudly supports the efforts of our nurses at Beckley and Summers County ARH in their efforts to ensure quality healthcare for the citizens of the community they serve. The nurses “Code of Ethics” dictates that nurses will advocate on behalf of their patients to ensure the delivery of quality care. The provision of quality care requires the appropriate number of nurses per patient, taking into consideration the education level and experience of the nurse and the acuity level of the patients.

We, as a state and a nation, are in the midst of nursing shortage initially created secondary to the current workforce environment in many of our facilities across the nation and destined to become worse if we are unable to improve these conditions with the impending aging of the baby boomers and our workforce. While we continue to graduate more nurses, many nurses leave the workforce quickly after graduation secondary to short staffing, mandatory overtime, and their subsequent inability to provide quality care in the current workplace environment.

Some hospitals are taking a proactive stance with this issue by achieving “Magnet” status and addressing these workplace issues. (West Virginia has one, Ruby Memorial, Morgantown), while others do not. The American Nurses Association recently filed a lawsuit against JACHO for not upholding regulations to ensure adequate staffing. If the provision of quality care is elusive due to workplace conditions, the nurse is left with two options, stay and advocate for change on behalf of the patients or leave.

Many of the nurses at Beckley and Summers County ARH have dedicated their entire careers to providing care to their patients, friends, and families at this facility. In the midst of short staffing, mandatory overtime, intermittent lack of appropriate equipment and supplies, lack of respect for nurses by the pervasive cuts in pay and refusal to follow the previous contract (as evidenced by arbitrator and Supreme Court Rulings for the nurses) for over a year, and recent intimidation tactics and interruption of patient care by Yessin (a union busting company), the nurses at Beckley ARH decided to make a stand.

Yet even in the hours prior to and during the start of the strike, two of our ARH nurses stayed to care for patients in a pediatric unit, when a replacement agency nurse refused to accept an assignment given by administration because she lacked the background or experience for patients on the pediatric unit. Again, another example of the care and dedication our nurses have for the people in this community. The decision to strike is never an easy one, but sometimes a very necessary one. Please join us in supporting the nurses at Beckley and Summers County ARH.

Pamela S Neal, RN, MSN-NA, C-FNP
President, WVNA