



## News Release

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# **ARHS Nurses Unveil Agenda for Nurse Retention, Quality Patient Care**

## ***RNs Call on Health System to Invest in Nursing***

(Altoona, PA) – On Monday, May 21, registered nurses at Altoona Regional Health System (ARHS) held a news conference where they unveiled their “Nurses’ Agenda” for focusing on retaining nurses and providing the highest quality of patient care.

“Nurses need to have a voice in decision-making for our profession and our patients,” said Jo Lines, RN, a nurse in the Medical Intensive Care Union who has worked for the health system for 15 years. “Our system has posted \$19 million in total profits over the last 3 years and increased CEO pay by 16% last year alone, but spending on nursing care has remained basically unchanged. It’s time to re-focus on retaining nurses and providing the highest quality of patient care.”

The ARHS RNs presented an enlarged poster of their agenda signed by the overwhelming majority of nurses at the Altoona Hospital Campus and Bon Secours Hospital Campus of ARHS.

“We’re on the front lines every day and we can help find solutions to improve care for our patients and our community. We want to work together with our hospital administration to ensure proper nurse staffing levels and ending mandatory overtime,” said Jaime Weigand, RN, in the Emergency Room who has been with the health system for 8 years.

**(MORE)**

**The Nurses' Agenda calls for:**

- Ensuring **adequate staffing and the highest quality of care** for patients.
- Working to put an **end to the dangerous practice of mandatory overtime.**
- Focusing on **recruitment and retention of RNs by:**
  - Achieving secure benefits, a first-class retirement program and professional compensation for all nurses
  - Improving the nursing work environment so ARHS can focus on recruitment and retention of RNs, including respect for the experience of current staff nurses.
- Gaining a **stronger voice for nurses in decisions** affecting the hospitals.
- **Working together with management** to build the strongest future for the health system and community.

“As frontline caregivers we have a window that no one else has into the needs of our patients and what can be done to improve our hospital,” said Linda Willnecker, RN, Surgery Center, who has worked for the health system for 26 years. “We have important concerns that need to be heard and addressed. Forming a union will give us the collective voice nurses need in our hospitals.”

Nurses at the two hospitals that are part of the Altoona Regional Health System will be voting on May 24<sup>th</sup> on forming a union.

**(MORE)**

## Quick Facts on Altoona Regional Health System

- The Altoona Regional Health System has posted **\$19 million in total profits** over the last three years, while ***spending on nursing care remained essentially flat.*** (Source: ***Audited Financial Statements for ARHS and Controlled Corporations, fiscal years 2004 – 2006***)
- While nurse retention and recruitment remains a significant problem at the hospitals, **ARHS has significantly raised executive salary and benefits packages** (Source: ARHS, IRS form 990, fiscal year 2006).
  - ARHS gave CEO James Barner a **16% raise in the last year** (an increase of almost \$50,000 on a \$309,029 salary, with another \$130,000 in other benefits.)
  - Other executives way up. Ron McConnell, Senior Vice President for Corporate Development received a salary **increase of 17%** in the last year, and Gary Naugle, Vice President for Human Resources received a **19% pay increase.**
- The health system is currently spending **hundreds of thousands of dollars** on the Chicago-based consulting firm of Labor Relations Institute, Inc. to attempt to stop ARHS nurses from forming a union.
- According to the Pennsylvania Department of Health's survey of registered nurses, **nearly 1/3 of RNs in Blair County reported being mandated in the previous two weeks – a rate 2 1/2 times higher than the statewide average**
- RNs in **Altoona and the surrounding county had the 3rd highest rate of mandatory overtime of all of Pennsylvania's 67 counties.** (Source: Pennsylvania Department of Health, Special Report on the Characteristics of the Registered Nurse Population in Pennsylvania, August 2006.)

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*Pennsylvania's Health Care Union, SEIU 1199P, is the state's largest and fastest-growing union of nurses and other health care workers, representing over 20,000 employees, including 8,000 RNs in hospitals, nursing homes, home care, and state health facilities.*