

2016 Nurses Strike: June 19-26

Day four of strike: Nurses highlighted violence they suffer on job

Editor's note: Each day of the strike, the Minnesota Nurses Association highlighted a different issue facing nurses.

By Steve Share, Labor Review editor,
MINNEAPOLIS — At a news conference on day four of a seven-day strike by members of the Minnesota Nurses Association, nurses who work for Allina Health highlighted the workplace violence issues they face every day — issues which they say Allina has refused to address in contract negotiations.

“Not a shift goes by that we’re not exposed to workplace violence, whether it’s physical or verbal from both patients and families,” said Pam Eliason, Brooklyn Center, a nurse in the intensive care unit at Abbott Northwestern Hospital, where she has worked 18-1/2 years. “I personally have had four major surgeries because of patient assault.”

“We’re just asking to be able to work in a safe place,” Eliason said. “They won’t even talk about that...”

“The emergency department, every shift we’re confronted with violence and a culture has formed where we are expected to take it,” said Cori Wasz, Prior Lake, who has worked nine years in the emergency department at Abbott Northwestern Hospital.

“There’s nothing set up to ensure our safety and security when we walk through the door,” Wasz said. “The things we have are our co-workers — our nurses, our emergency medical technicians — and the security officer who happens to be in the department.”

“We don’t have [a security guard] stationed there 24 hours a day,” Wasz said. “We have asked for that.”

Linda Lease, a former intensive care unit nurse, shared a horrific story of an assault that forced her to retire.

“In May 2011, I sustained a traumatic brain injury when a patient kicked me in the head,” Lease said. The patient was trying to remove tubes and Lease and other hospital staff struggled to restrain him. “He flipped over and caught me in the right temple,” she said.

“After the shift was over I did report to the emergency room,” Lease related. She was told she had only a contusion and was good to go.

The next day, however, her co-workers noticed clearly “there was something wrong” with her. She seemed unsure of herself and was forgetting things.

Lease went to see her own doctor and was diagnosed with traumatic brain injury and a concussion.

For two years, she tried to continue



Linda Lease



Pam Eliason



Cori Wasz

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— Pam Eliason, nurse in the intensive care unit at Abbott Northwestern Hospital

working but then her physician suggested she needed to retire.

“I still suffer from... my symptoms,” Lease said.

“This is the type of thing that happens in all hospitals around the country,” she said.

In the current contract negotiations, Allina has refused to address non-economic issues like workplace violence while insisting nurses move off of MNA health insurance plans and accept what the nurses say are plans which would be much more expensive — for the nurses.

“We are asking them to address workplace violence issues,” said Angie Bec-

chetti, Maple Grove, a rapid response nurse at Abbott Northwestern.

Becchetti outlined several steps nurses want Allina to take:

- Create a special committee to address workplace violence, including bedside nurses as committee members;

- Increase the number of hours of training for nurses that addresses workplace violence from two hours to eight hours;

- Use instructors for the workplace violence training who have special expertise in this area;

- Implement the use of a special form nurses can use to report and document

instances of workplace violence;

- Don’t remove bedside nurses from the workplace violence committee if they miss meetings because of workplace scheduling issues.

As the news conference concluded, delivery nurse Robin Rush issued a special appeal to Dr. Penny Wheeler, Allina CEO: “We know you haven’t been at the negotiation table... But please come and talk to us... You can hear what we have to say; We can hear what you have to say... We’re all here for the same reason. We want to take good care of our patients.”

Delivery nurse Robin Rush issued a special appeal to Dr. Penny Wheeler, Allina CEO: ‘We know you haven’t been at the negotiation table... But please come and talk to us... You can hear what we have to say; We can hear what you have to say... We’re all here for the same reason. We want to take good care of our patients.’

Note to readers:

A reader called after the June 24, 2016 issue of the *Labor Review* arrived, upset that that issue contained no coverage of the nurses strike.

We’re a monthly publication, with one week between our print date and publication date, so the June 24 issue had gone to press June 17 — before the strike began.

For the latest news, updates and photos, visit the MRL Facebook page — facebook.com/minneapolisunions — or see workdayminnesota.org.