



Thursday, March 13, 2008 - 5:51 PM PDT

## Contra Costa nurses decide not to strike at Martinez hospital

East Bay Business Times - by [Marie-Anne Hogarth](#)

Contra Costa County has averted a nurses strike at its regional medical center in Martinez and also at its clinics.

The approximately 500 nurses represented by the Oakland-based [California Nurses Association](#) were originally set to stage a strike from March 21 to 24 in conjunction with one organized by the union at Sutter Health affiliate hospitals. Instead, the nurses and the county reached a deal late Wednesday night to avoid the strike, and will continue negotiations.

"Registered nurses from [Contra Costa Regional Medical Center](#) have withdrawn their notice to strike the facility," the nurses said in a prepared statement. "The facility's RNs decided to do this as a result of significant progress at the bargaining table, specifically the withdrawal by County officials of their proposals for cutbacks on nurse retirement and health care benefits."

The strike might have been a bigger headache for the county also if any of its 9,000 employees also facing the same cutbacks had staged sympathy strikes through their labor representatives at Public Employees Union, Local 1, the American of State County and Municipal Employees and Service Employees International Union.

"In our experience, some year-plus ago when they did have a one-day strike with certain labor organizations, other non-related organizations also elected to join in by not crossing the picket line," said John Cullen, who is the Contra Costa County administrator. "That is something you can expect to happen." Still, he added that he received no notice of this.

County health officials previously predicted that the strike would have cost the safety net hospital and clinics between \$1 million and \$1.5 million in expenses to cover costs such as replacement workers, plus loss of revenues.

Cullen said that one of the issues at hand is the growing cost of health care for active county employees and retirees.

"It is the issue we are trying to work with all of our employee organizations," Cullen said. "Our group, CNA and the county have agreed to put together a work group to aggressively address health care cost containment ideas and options."

He said that the union and the county would continue to discuss issues related to patient care -- such as ratios, training and work conditions -- as well as compensation and how to contain costs to provide health care to the nurses and retirees. The next bargaining session is scheduled for March 17.

Contra Costa County's nurses have been at the bargaining table about five weeks.

A strike at Bay Area Sutter Health hospitals is set for March 21.

*mhogarth@bizjournals.com | 925-598-1432*