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LSMC nurses vote to decertify union

With a secret ballot vote of 68-59, the nurses of Lee's Summit Medical Center voted Oct. 29-30 to decertify Nurses United/National Nurses Organizing Committee-California Nurses Association as its union.

The National Labor Relations Board oversaw the election.

The vote came following a petition filed July 1 with the National Labor Relations Board and then circulated among the nurses at Lee's Summit Medical Center.

Thirty percent of the nurses represented by the union were required to sign the petition if the election were to be held, and according to information from Lee's Summit Medical Center, the number of names on the petition was determined to be in excess of the necessary minimum.

Lee's Summit Medical Center CEO Damond Boatwright said the hospital is very pleased with the results. "There is a time and place for union representation," Boatwright said. "But I think the healthcare field is not the place."

Boatwright said the nurses at Lee's Summit Medical Center agreed and decided, "Union representation is unnecessary to maintain a healthy work environment."

"Above all else, we are committed to the care and improvement of human life. We are pleased to be able to continue to provide quality care with no outside distractions," said Nancy Melcher, RN, MBA, chief nursing officer at LSMC.

Boatwright said he thinks the movement to decertify occurred because among other things, employee engagement has increased by more than 17 percent, according to information from LSMC.

For the last three years, LSMC has placed in the top 10 percent of HCA hospitals for its employee satisfaction scores.

"I attribute the decertification vote to Lee's Summit Medical Center having a good track record for success that is built on trust and open lines of communication," he said.

The nurses of LSMC voted to join the union in April 2000. During that time there have been two collective bargaining agreements and Boatwright said a third was recently signed.

However, since the results were nine votes apart — three nurses did not cast their votes — Boatwright said he realizes the hospital has some work to do.

“After nine years of having a union and two collective bargaining agreements with a third recently signed, the vote tells me that half the nurses attribute that success to the union and the other half attribute the success to the management team,” he said. “We still have some work to do to make sure the environment is healthy and everyone feels empowered and everyone feels confident.”

Boatwright said he has worked as an administrator for seven hospitals and LSMC is the first that was unionized.

“It’s not common for hospitals in this part of the country to have nurses unions,” he said.

Nurses from Centerpoint Hospital in Independence voted to decertify in April, while nurses at St. Mary’s in Blue Springs voted to decertify in 2006.

Boatwright said this vote signifies the “closing of the last chapter on Lee’s Summit Hospital and officially opening the first chapter of Lee’s Summit Medical Center.”

“It’s really about moving forward,” he said. “We need to heal both sides involved and focus on something we can all agree on, and that’s the care and improvement of human life.”

As of press time a representative from the Kansas City Chapter of Nurses United had not returned phone calls.

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