

Mercy, nurses union agree on tentative labor contract

July 20, 2007

Mercy Medical Center and the Oregon Nurses Association this morning reached tentative agreement on a labor contract that would cover the hospital's 344 nurses.

The nurses have been working without a contract for about the last year and a half. Two-thirds of the hospital's previously nonunionized nurses asked to be represented by the Oregon Nurses Association, which began negotiating with the hospital in May 2006.

The breakthrough came following a 17-hour negotiating session. Both sides unanimously recommended that the tentative agreement be ratified by the ONA bargaining unit and Mercy's board of directors, according to a joint press release issued by the hospital and the union.

A vote on the contract by Mercy nurses has been scheduled for the week of July 30. Details on the contract will not be released publicly until after the vote.

One hang-up had been over whether or not a closed shop would be instituted. Under a closed shop, employees covered by a union contract either are required to join the union or pay "fair share" dues covering benefits nonunion workers derive from the union contract. The union had pressed for nonunion nurses to pay \$51 of the \$60 monthly dues charged union members.

Wages and benefits, along with retirement benefits and management rights, were other issues that had remained unresolved in earlier bargaining sessions.

On Monday, the nurses held an informational picket in front of the hospital to bring attention to the union efforts.