

Nurses announce one-day strike at Dominican Hospital and affiliates in San Jose, Gilroy, Daly City

By Jondi Gumz
Santa Cruz Sentinel
Posted: 10/20/2009 09:51:46 AM PDT

SANTA CRUZ — Frustrated by prolonged contract negotiations, the California Nurses Association on Monday announced a one-day strike at Dominican Hospital starting 7 a.m. Oct. 30.

The strike, ending at 7 a.m. Oct. 31, will affect two-dozen hospitals affiliated with Catholic Healthcare West and three others affiliated with Daughters of Charity, including O'Connor Hospital in San Jose, Seton Medical Center in Daly City and Saint Louise Regional Hospital in Gilroy.

"This is the longest negotiation we've ever had with them," said Lorna Grundeman, a nurse at Dominican for 21 years and one of the bargaining representatives for the California Nurses Association.

Negotiations with CHW, Dominican's parent, began in March and the contract, which covers about 600 nurses, has been extended several times since expiring in June.

Dominican spokesman Mike Lee released a statement, saying Dominican is "perplexed by the union's decision to engage in this disruptive, costly and counterproductive job action." Negotiations have been "hampered by the union's unrealistic salary and benefit proposals," according to Lee, who said nurses want increases of 6 percent per year over the life of a four-year contract, that with step increases, would mean increases of "more than 32 percent for many nurses."

The average full-time nurse at a Catholic Healthcare West hospital earns more than \$100,000 a year, and health-care coverage for the employee and dependents is Advertisement fully paid by the employer, at an average cost of \$19,800 per year, according to Lee.

Grundeman said nurses are concerned about health care benefits.

"Some of the nurses could be forced from a PPO preferred provider organization to HMO health maintenance organization and doctors are not accepting HMOs," she said. "It would cause a real hardship to nurses. They would have to go farther from home for medical care." She said nurses also want the hospital to use Cal OSHA regulations to protect them and their patients from H1N1 flu.

The 10-day advance notice of the strike is required by law.

This gives the hospital time to reschedule surgeries and send patients home, Grundeman explained, adding that "We will have people on the line who can take care of true emergencies." Lee said Dominican will remain open with all services available but recognizes the strike may cause inconvenience for patients and families.

"We are taking every step possible to lessen its effects," his statement said, adding that "CHW remains eager and willing to reach a fair settlement in a respectful and professional environment."