



## **Nurses prepare for two-day strike starting Thursday** **Hospitals to implement lock out for 3 additional days after walkout**

By Tim Simmers, BUSINESS WRITER

Article Last Updated: 12/12/2007 02:36:26 AM PST

Thousands of registered nurses are expected to walk off their jobs Thursday and Friday at 13 Bay Area hospitals, marking their second strike in just over two months.

The strike would primarily affect hospitals affiliated with Sutter Health, a nonprofit network of hospitals and doctors' groups.

Those planning to walk off their jobs include about 650 nurses in San Mateo County at Peninsula Medical Center in Burlingame and Mills Health Center in San Mateo.

Those two local facilities, which are operated by MillsPeninsula Health Services and affiliated with Sutter Health, have hired replacement nurses to care for patients during the strike.

They plan to keep hospital doors open and do business as usual, hospital officials said.

The nurses are expected to begin the strike at 7 a.m. Thursday. They are represented by the California Nurses Association union.

The strike could affect up to 5,000 nurses at the 13 hospitals.

The two-day October strike was the largest by nurses in California in a decade.

Both sides remain far apart on the issues, which nurses insist are about patient care, including safe staffing ratios, lifting standards for nurses, retirement security and health care benefits.

Management contends that it adheres to nurse-to-patient ratios mandated by the state, and offers health care and pension coverage "far superior to other industries."

Wages are not an issue. The average nurse's salary is \$56.16 per hour. New nurses make in the \$40-per-hour range.

"Sutter notoriously has much greater labor-relations conflicts than the other major hospital chains in the state," said Ken Jacobs, chairman of the UC Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education. "Sutter has been extremely resistant to the notion that issues that affect patient care be a subject of bargaining."

After the nurses struck the hospitals in October, those at Mills-Peninsula Health Services returned to their jobs after two days.

This time, they will be locked out for three additional days after the strike, hospital officials said.

"This time, we didn't have a choice," said Debbie Goodin, vice president of human resources at Mills-Peninsula Health Services. The agency that is supplying the replacement nurses, U.S. Nursing, wanted a five-day contract to assure that it could supply the nurses, Goodin said.

Genel Morgan, a San Mateo resident and intensive care nurse at Peninsula Medical Center, said the lockout "is their way of squeezing nurses financially to get (nurses) to not support the strike."

Charles Idelson, spokesman for the CNA, also slammed the Mills-Peninsula lockout.

"Why do they have more loyalty to a strike agency than to regular nurses who live in the community and have served patients, in some cases, for years?" Idelson said.

More than 95 percent of the Sutter Health nurses on the Peninsula participated in the strike in October. Goodin said she expects some additional local nurses to cross the picket line and come to work Thursday. Other Sutter officials said the same, but time will tell.

"These strikes are costing millions of dollars, and somewhere along the line, nurses should be asking questions about the motive of the union," Goodin said.

She added that hospitals have to fly replacement nurses in from other states, train them, feed them, put them up in a hotel and make sure they're competent. The strike in October cost the Mills-Peninsula group more than \$1 million, Goodin said.

Goodin believes the issue for CNA is more about growing union membership at other Sutter Health facilities.

Morgan dismissed the membership issue as a minor issue.

"This is about patient and nurse safety, and having enough staff to care for patients," said Morgan. "Nurses have reached a point where the conditions are such that they will not stay silent."

The two sides on the Peninsula have met 15 times since negotiations began in May. The last negotiation was held Nov. 14, but talks broke down.

Separate talks have been held all along at most of the hospitals, with varying degrees of progress.

Business writer Tim Simmers can be reached at 650-348-4361 or by e-mail at [tsimmers@bayareanewsgroup.com](mailto:tsimmers@bayareanewsgroup.com).

