

news

Nurses Strike Over But Fight Over Benefits Remains

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It was back to work Monday for thousands of Bay Area registered nurses who participated in a 10-day regional strike at Sutter Health hospitals, but the fight is far from over, a California Nurses Association spokesman said. Nurses began striking at 7 a.m. on March 21 because they believe particular work procedures, such as lunch breaks, heavy-lifting policies and nurse health coverage, are not conducive to patient care, CNA spokesman Chuck Idelson said.

No negotiations were scheduled as a result of the strike, but Idelson contends that the battle will continue. Until the union gets what it believes will amount to better working conditions for nurses and an improved environment for patients, "we'll have a continuing battle that probably no one wants," he said.

However, both a spokeswoman from Alta Bates Summit Medical Center in the East Bay and a spokesman from California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco said Monday that their hospitals are more than willing to sit down and talk.

"We serve at the pleasure of the federal mediator," said Alta Bates spokeswoman Carolyn Kemp. "We're ready to continue negotiating. (The nurses) work extremely hard and they deserve a good contract." Kemp said she believes the nurses already receive great benefits, better than most people in the country, but they'll do what it takes to prevent a fourth strike.

The number of striking nurses is ambiguous because the CNA reports a little less than 4,000 but both California Pacific Medical Center spokesman Kevin McCormack and Kemp said they believed it was about half that number.

In either regard, patient care was not affected. Both hospitals reported an average number of visitors and hospital procedures such as childbirths and heart transplants.

Affected Sutter hospitals included St. Luke's Hospital and California Pacific Medical Center in San Francisco, San Leandro Hospital, Alta Bates-Summit Medical Center in Berkeley and Oakland, Mills-Peninsula Health Services in Burlingame and San Mateo, Eden Medical Center in Castro Valley, Sutter Delta in Antioch and Sutter Solano in Vallejo.

Registered Nurse from Alta Bates Summit Medical Center Jan Rodolfo said nurses from her hospital will talk this week to figure out the next step.

"Another strike is a possibility if it's necessary," said Rodolfo.

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