

San Francisco Chronicle

Nurses threatening to strike at Sutter Health hospitals in Bay Area

[George Raine, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

Wednesday, August 29, 2007

(08-28) 15:51 PDT SAN FRANCISCO -- Union-represented registered nurses at seven Sutter Health affiliate hospitals in the Bay Area have authorized their contract negotiating teams to call strikes if agreements are not reached.

The union, the California Nurses Association, represents some 5,000 registered nurses at 14 Sutter Health affiliate hospitals in Northern California, and separate contract negotiations are being conducted at 10 of them. It is expected that registered nurses at the three other hospitals involved in negotiations will authorize strikes by week's end.

Sutter Health managers deny the union's allegations that negotiators for the hospitals do not accept as serious a number of issues the union raises and are disrespectful. They also say much of the language in the nurses' proposal is designed to accommodate the organizing of nonunion workers.

Each negotiation has its own unique issues, but a common denominator, said Bonnie Castillo, director of the Sutter Health division at the California Nurses Association, is that "Sutter has not responded in a meaningful way to our patient-care proposal." This refers to numerous issues including staffing, adequate break relief for meals and rest periods, and equipment safety, among others, she said.

Jan Rodolfo, a nurse in the oncology unit at Alta Bates Summit Medical Center in Oakland and a member of the bargaining team for the nurses' association, said Sutter negotiators "tend to be very dismissive.

"We talk about staffing, and they literally roll their eyes," Rodolfo said. "So you get a sense of them not appreciating or respecting the registered nurses they employ. It's very frustrating."

Julie Clayton, vice president for women and children services at the California campus of the California Pacific Medical Center and administrator for the hospital's California and St. Luke's campuses, denied the accusation.

"I think we have been very responsive to our nurses at California Pacific Medical Center," she said. "We value and respect them a great deal."

Last week, the California Nurses Association and Texas-based Tenet Healthcare Corp. settled a contract covering nurses at nine California hospitals and a separate agreement that gives the union limited rights to attempt to organize nurses at nonunion Tenet-owned hospitals outside California. It is that agreement, said Clayton, that the union is trying to replicate in negotiations with the Sutter Health affiliates, but is meeting resistance.

Tenet agreed to remain neutral and not interfere with an expedited National Labor Relations Board election if nonunion nurses want to choose whether to be represented by a union. The union said the accord is the first of its kind in the nation.

Clayton, of California Pacific Medical Center, said the hospital considers whether to join a union "an individual decision" that should not be facilitated in the contract being negotiated.

"We are not convinced that language is language that advocates for what our nurses want," Clayton said. "We have been spending lots of time with our staff asking them what are the important things for you in this contract."

Clayton said the hospital has offered its registered nurses - who she said earned on average \$116,000 last year - a 20 percent pay raise over four years as well as an improved retirement benefit package.

Clayton said the union has not presented the hospital with a wage proposal.

Hospitals on list

Registered nurses represented by the California Nurses Association have authorized strikes at seven Sutter Health affiliate hospitals; strike votes are pending at three others.

Strikes authorized

- Sutter Delta in Antioch
- Sutter Solano in Vallejo
- California Pacific in San Francisco
- St. Luke's in San Francisco
- Alta Bates Summit in Oakland and Berkeley
- Sutter of Santa Rosa
- Marin General Hospital

Votes pending

- Eden Medical Center in Castro Valley
- San Leandro Hospital and Mills-Peninsula Health Services in Burlingame and San Mateo
- Novato Community Hospital

E-mail George Raine at graine@sfnchronicle.com.

This article appeared on page **C - 1** of the San Francisco Chronicle