

Hospital workers vote for strike

BY ERIC LEACH, Staff Writer
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WEST HILLS - Upset over contract negotiations, nurses and other health care workers at West Hills Hospital voted Thursday night to authorize a one-day strike if contract negotiations are not resolved.

Eighty-seven percent of union workers voted to approve the strike, according to Thea Lavin, a spokeswoman for the Service Employees International Union Health Care Workers-West.

The move comes one day after similar workers at Los Robles Hospital & Medical Center in Thousand Oaks voted to do the same. Both hospitals are owned by HCA, Inc., of Nashville, Tenn.

Caregivers at California's five HCA hospitals do not feel the negotiations are moving forward in good faith, and that the result could be a one-day strike that could involve about 4,000 employees statewide, officials of the SEIU Health Care Workers-West said.

"Striking is our last resort. My fellow union members and I hope that management bargains in good faith and agrees to a contract that truly allows Los Robles health care workers to care for patients," Eileen Hocht, a registered nurse at Los Robles, said in a prepared statement. "Our intention is to fight for patients in bargaining sessions. But if left with no other choice, my union members and I are strong enough to fight for patient care on the picket line."

The workers say they want an industry-standard contract that includes safe-staffing guidelines, pensions, better health plans, better wages and no more forced overtime.

No strike date has been set, but this is the last step before a one-day walkout, which could come in the next few weeks.

"We're very hopeful that a settlement will be reached in the future," said Kris Carraway-Bowman, a spokeswoman for Los Robles.

Health care workers' contract at West Hills, Los Robles and the HCA facility in Riverside expired June 30. There are about 600 such workers at West Hills, about 1,000 at Los Robles and another 1,500 in Riverside, where employees already have authorized a strike.

Less than a month ago, 1,000 health care workers at two HCA-owned hospitals in San Jose also voted to authorize a one-day strike.

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