



Nurses allege unsafe conditions in complaints

RIVERSIDE COMMUNITY: Patients are said to be at risk. Hospital officials call the claims a tactic.

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What's next

After workers' contracts expired today, union workers could vote to strike.

Registered nurses have filed 58 complaints since January against the company that owns Riverside Community Hospital, alleging to state

officials that unsafe working conditions have put patients at risk.

Of those complaints, 13 were filed against Riverside Community, union leaders said. The remainder were filed against West Hills Medical Center, which also is owned by Nashville-based HCA Healthcare.

Union leaders accused the hospital group of violating the state-mandated nurse-to-patient ratios and forcing nurses to work mandatory overtime.

Hospital officials denied the allegations and called Thursday's announcement a union tactic to pressure management into an agreement as the workers' contract with the hospital expires today.

Registered nurses plan to file a complaint with the national agency that oversees hospital accreditation to bring attention to their allegations, said Thea Lavin, a spokeswoman for United Healthcare Workers-West, a 130,000-member local of the Service Employees International Union.

Riverside Community health-care workers could take a vote to strike in the upcoming weeks if a consensus is not reached on union requests for additional support staff and an independent arbitrator to rule on staffing guidelines, union president Sal Rosselli said.

"We're not looking to break ground with them," Rosselli said in a phone interview. "We are looking for the same health standards that we have with other hospitals."

Tracy Dallarda, spokeswoman for Riverside Community, said the hospital has more than 600 nurses on staff, which is sufficient to meet state requirements of one nurse for every five patients. She also said it is untrue that nurses are forced to work mandatory overtime.

Of the complaints union leaders say Riverside nurses filed with the state, Dallarda said she only knows of four. Of those, she said, only one was substantiated by the Department of Health Services.

Riverside Community Hospital is prepared to hire outside nursing and support staff if a strike were to occur, Dallarda said.
