

Union protests hospital staff shortages and overtime

HCA HEALTHCARE: Union members blast shortages, overtime. Management says it's a contract ploy.

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RIVERSIDE - About 200 health-care workers marched outside Riverside Community Hospital on Wednesday to bring attention to what they call unsafe staffing practices.

The union representing the workers is pushing for more dietitians, nursing assistants and workers responsible for some of the critical cleanups that prevent unsanitary conditions.

Riverside Community Hospital officials countered by saying the rally was a common union tactic to put pressure on management as the workers' contract nears a June 30 expiration.

The lunchtime rally was one of three organized by the United Healthcare Workers-West, a 130,000-member statewide local of the Service Employees International Union. Rallies also took place at HCA Healthcare-owned hospitals in Thousand Oaks and West Hills.

Stacey Marshall, a registered nurse who lives a few blocks from her job at Riverside Community Hospital, said she has had to pick up a mop daily to wipe floors because a custodian is not available.

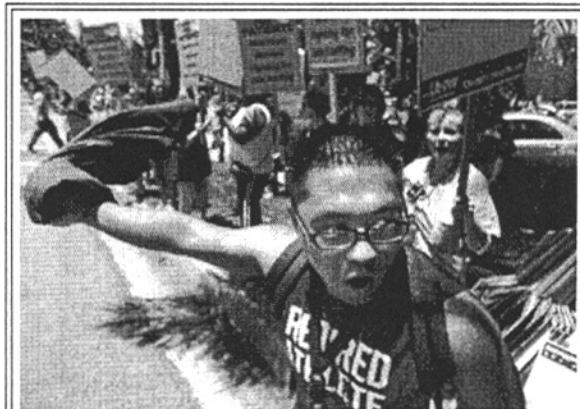
Marshall, 43, who works in cardiac procedure, said she also has had to work 18- to 20-hour days because staffing is so low.

"Would you want me to take care of you when you're having a massive heart attack after I've been up for 20 hours?" Marshall asked.

Tracy Dallarda, a Riverside Community Hospital spokeswoman, said management and representatives of the Service Employee International Union are scheduled to meet six times between now and June 30.

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[Video: Nurse and healthcare worker rally at Riverside Community Hospital](#)



Jason Fritz / The Press-Enterprise
Jason Tindungan, a Riverside Community Hospital radiology department worker, protests with other health-care staffers Wednesday.

The for-profit HCA Healthcare bought Riverside Community Hospital in 1997. Since then, union representatives said staffing and morale have declined.

Thea Lavin said in a prepared release that staffing levels are set by corporate policymakers at HCA headquarters in Nashville, not by local health-care workers, a contention that Riverside Community Hospital's spokeswoman said is not true.

"Our hospital staffing is based on the number of patients we have and how sick they are -- it's not done by corporate," Dallarda said.

The hospital also disagrees with the union's effort to have an arbitrator rule on certain staffing guidelines. Also, the hospital does not force anyone to work overtime, Dallarda said.

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