

## Partners for the Duration

### A Clinical Point of View

U.S. Nursing ensures uninterrupted quality patient care during the longest healthcare strike in over a decade

Case Study

## ► Situation Overview

### 2 Weeks

When U.S. Nursing (USN) was notified of an approaching work stoppage at an East Coast hospital, preparations began quickly under a constrained planning timeline for a run-of-the-mill five-to-ten-day nursing strike. It became apparent early on that the stoppage would be anything but ordinary.

### 3 Months

After the first two weeks of the strike passing with no end in sight, longer term logistics and recruiting plans were operationalized. When the stoppage reached three months, it was clear that preparations needed to be made for an extraordinary indefinite job action.

### Indefinite

Indefinite strikes require an intensive effort of personnel to coordinate day-to-day management, continuous recruiting, deployment, scheduling and rotation of staff. USN's meticulous and unwavering attention to operational and clinical staffing details ensured patients received uninterrupted care during the nearly one-year long strike.

# ▼ All Hands On Deck

With no resolution forthcoming at the bargaining table and strike risk high, USN was engaged by the client and executed an immediate nationwide recruitment and licensing effort to provide replacement clinicians in case of a strike notice. Simultaneously, plans were developed to deploy, transport, house, credential and orient the clinicians, and processes were identified and implemented to ensure COVID safety, including social distancing, testing, reporting and carefulness for operations and clinical staff during such a challenging and unprecedented pandemic.

Daily planning calls with the hospital's senior leadership team and USN operations and clinical team began at full force under limited preparation timing to complete all aspects of deployment planning for the possibility of a labor disruption. Within days, USN had enacted tracking of temporary licensing for hundreds of clinicians and recruited to fill the order at 100%. When the strike began, USN filled the order of 229 clinicians to fulfill the first week's staffing strategy, which included tactical consolidation plans. USN continued recruitment efforts for deployment of more than 100 additional nurses the second week to open units and service lines to meet the hospital's broadened staffing strategy.

Karen Fountain, MBA, MSN, RN, USN Clinical Services Director stated, "At the time it was unclear that the USN team would soon be among an unprecedented work stoppage." By week two, USN had 365 working nurses on-site and executed its indefinite strike planning strategy to address on-going logistics, compliance, daily unit reporting, weekly scheduling, electronic timekeeping and scanning, just a few vital facets of strike management in an indefinite landscape. Fountain went on to say, "We worked side-by-side with the facility clinical directors and C-suite to ensure continuity of care for the community, address COVID guidelines and safety, and ensure comprehensive management for the months to come."

Even as the industry leader in providing work stoppage preparation and management for more than 30 years, most of the current USN team had yet to witness a strike of this duration, especially



during a global pandemic. Nonetheless, uninterrupted quality patient care was delivered through strategic utilization of USN's deep database of experienced nurses, collaborative planning, clinical expertise and swift operational execution.



# ▶ An Evolving Challenge

As the strike grew in duration, the challenge shifted from meeting the initial requirement for nurses, to sustainable staffing with increased clinicians on-site to provide two shifts off per week, as well as backfill positions upon nurse end dates. “Continuous recruitment and closely managing replacement deployments to adjust coverage was imperative so we had adequate staff on-site for days off while keeping all clinical services covered. Ensuring clinicians had an opportunity to rest and recuperate during this unique time was imperative to patient care,” Fountain stated.

The USN team implemented a series of scheduling tools ensuring a rotation for each healthcare professional, allowing for days off. With this type of scheduling cadence in place, USN was able to safeguard the hospital’s staffing thresholds in each unit for continuous 100% staffing throughout the 10-month strike, which covered all major holidays.

Fountain states, “When you get an indefinite strike, you are really thinking it may last just a few weeks, not a few months. Providing the robust strategies and experience that USN is known for ensured long-term operations and quality care was delivered in seamless fashion, and the hospital had real-time reporting and data to make agile decisions on census and admissions.” She points to the detailed planning, clinical vetting and interviewing process, and deployment management, along with a collaborative and trusted approach with facility leadership as keys to the overall success. “As challenges arose, adjustments were made to maintain quality care and patient safety, keeping an eye on continuous opportunities for improvement.”



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Karen Fountain, MBA, MSN, RN  
USN Clinical Services Director



# ▶ Getting the Job Done

During the unprecedented 46-week stoppage, USN provided 1,227 unique nurses, received zero Department of Health (DOH) deficiencies with DOH onsite daily and managed 42 separate deployments for backfill, with correlating onboarding sessions. When security challenges arose, they were proactively resolved with increased and collaborative security plans on-site, as well as at all lodging sites; a true partnership with all facility leaders to ensure operations during the work stoppage ran smoothly.

As with any long-term strike, workforce transition planning and management post-strike is essential to stabilization of hospital staffing. Although it can be a challenge to co-exist with returning hospital staff post-strike, USN continuously kept 120 crisis clinicians on-site during this transition, and supported the hospital gaps as new hospital staff and traditional travelers were brought in. Known replacement clinicians working side-by-side with permanent hospital staff who had returned after settling their contract can be contentious at times. Extreme diligence and close management of the situation was employed by both USN and hospital leadership teams to ensure continuity and quality

of patient care was maintained. USN management remained on-site during transitions for months, with many crisis travelers staying for up to 11 months to support this pivotal time for the facility. One of the hospital clinical leaders relayed these parting words, "My team was successful because USN listened. That is something many during this time did not do. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for your extraordinary effort, commitment, and courage. It did not go unnoticed."

Fountain points to the systematic way USN approaches these types of incredibly complex and fluid situations. "We wanted our team and our client to be prepared to address and de-escalate any possible volatile situation. Every effort was given to ensure our staff was confident in their role and the care and safety of the patient remained the central focus," Fountain said.

Fountain went on to state, "Our staff developed deep relationships with the facility team. These relationships were founded in trust and transcended the work stoppage. Throughout the job action, with all the planning, adjusting and logistical management, this cohesive team of facility and USN staff worked together to focus on the main priority - the patient. It speaks highly to the type of compassionate care that is delivered by the care teams at the hospital and by those dedicated clinicians USN is fortunate enough to partner with during strike and crisis challenges."



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A Hospital Clinical Leader



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