

Tensions are Rising

The Importance of Preparing for a Potential Work Stoppage

INTRODUCTION

In the wake of a pandemic that tossed healthcare organizations into a tailspin, tensions between hospital workers and administration appear to be at an all-time high. Since the pandemic began in 2020, we have seen work stoppages across the country—including an unprecedented 46-week stoppage at an east coast hospital that lasted almost the entirety of 2021.

While burnout is a major concern of healthcare workers, it is not the only factor causing these tensions to rise. Dissatisfaction with pay and benefits among nurses, technicians, doctors and other frontline medical staff has these employee groups turning to unions to push back against management policies they deem unfair or inadequate.

It all combines to form a perfect storm that could lead to a potential work stoppage. No healthcare organization can take the current landscape lightly. Labor actions are popping up across the country, even in healthcare organizations that have long boasted about healthy and happy workforces. As these labor disputes become more frequent, hospitals and healthcare organizations must be proactive in putting plans in place to ensure continuation of care and operations should a work stoppage arise.

Even the most innovative solutions are sometimes not enough to avoid a work stoppage.

AN UNCERTAIN LANDSCAPE FOR HOSPITALS AND HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATIONS

To put it mildly, healthcare organizations are in a labor pinch. After losing significant numbers of experienced frontline workers to burnout since the pandemic began, additional headwinds are facing hospital administrators. A rapidly aging nursing workforce leaves the future of staffing in flux. Forecasts show about 203,200 openings for registered nurses projected each year, on average, over the next decade. Many of those openings are expected to result from the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations or exit the labor force, including those who retire.

Complicating the challenging staffing environment is the increasing costs associated with staffing, both for permanent staff and temporary solutions. The discrepancy in pay, due to travel requirements, supplemental staffing, etc. that's common between temporary staff and permanent staff further complicates the landscape, frequently causing friction on care units. This has put tremendous pressure on healthcare organizations to find ways to sufficiently compensate frontline caregivers and helping them feel rewarded in their work.

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Numbers from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) provide even more clarity on the rising tensions in healthcare. The BLS only tracks strikes involving 1,000 or more workers and in the 24 months between January 2020 and December 2022, nine of 24 total work stoppages across ALL industries—meeting that classification involved unions representing healthcare workers.

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The stoppages and threatened stoppages are alarming, but they only tell half of the story. Organizing activity by physicians has skyrocketed in recent years. The Committee of Residents and Interns, a branch of Service Employees International Union, reports five election wins in 2022 and four election wins in 2021. This compares to just three wins in the preceding two years. Currently, the CIR-SEIU represents approximately 25,000 individuals.

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WORK STOPPAGE PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

By planning for a potential work stoppage now, hospitals can ensure they maintain a safe working environment for everyone involved should a disruption occur. At U.S. Nursing (USN), we understand the labor negotiation process can create multiple “what-if” scenarios for hospital executives to consider.

Fortunately, we can call on our long history in the industry to provide custom options for hospitals to consider during union discussions.

Whether the threat of a work stoppage is imminent, or you are simply doing your due diligence in preparation of any contingency, our industry experts recommend you:

Enlist help before you need it: The sooner you can establish a relationship with USN, the better—even if a work stoppage isn't currently a possibility. Maintaining contact with our professionals, taking advantage of our knowledge of the healthcare landscape and understanding how we can help when the need arises, ensures you can quickly and efficiently put a plan in place if the need arises.

Keep a pulse on your worksite: The more you know about how your workforce is feeling, the timelier you can be in responding to needs. The easiest way to manage a work stoppage is to ensure it doesn't happen in the first place. Strategies like workplace surveys, “town hall” meetings and the like can help you gain insight into what frontline care providers are feeling and thinking.

Maintain communications with union leadership: While relations with union leadership can sometimes be contentious, it is vital to maintain an open dialogue to be prepared for actions that may be coming.

USN can provide valuable insight and expertise to help hospitals plan for any size work stoppage, from small to large, single location to multi- facility campuses, ensuring all necessary steps are taken to protect and provide continuity of care for their patients.

CONCLUSION

If not effectively addressed, a potential work stoppage doesn't just disrupt patient care—it can have significant ramifications for the surrounding community. Since 1989, USN has been committed to working with healthcare facilities and clinicians to provide turn-key solutions during work stoppages, ensuring continuous, high-quality patient care for hundreds of facilities across the country.

It is essential that hospitals are prepared for any labor-related disruption to operations. USN can provide valuable insight and expertise to help hospitals plan for any size work stoppage, from small to large, single location to multi- facility campuses, ensuring all necessary steps are taken to protect and provide continuity of care for their patients. Preparing for a potential stoppage now can save time, money and ensure the facility is properly staffed to care for the community you serve.

Whether your facility is preparing for an upcoming contract renewal, examining a potential work stoppage or has received a 10-day notice, USN can rapidly assemble a project team to address the situation and provide instant guidance.

Our deep database of experienced clinicians can be rapidly recruited, credentialed and scheduled to arrive on-site for orientation, days before the work stoppage commences.

Specifically, our proven approach involves:

Expert Strategic Consultation: Unrivaled experience in healthcare work stoppages, strike preparation and execution, clinical management and logistical planning. Our diverse team includes seasoned clinicians, experienced in crafting staffing plans for your variety of units and specialties. Big or small, we can provide strategic consultation and implementation on any size strike your facility may be facing

Contingency Planning: Recognizing the strike landscape can be highly unpredictable, U.S. Nursing provides multiple options for hospitals to consider during union discussions. Our expert team can also advise administrators on labor notices, stopgap planning and staffing scenarios for various notice timelines and potential strike sizes.

A Turnkey Solution: No need to contact additional staffing facilities for your needs. USN can successfully manage the holistic project to ensure nursing, allied, ancillary and EVS projects have one owner managing all staffing and accountability, providing the best supplemental patient care in the market.

As your trusted partner, USN is the only staffing agency to guarantee delivery of experienced clinicians at the start of your facility's work stoppage.



Company

U.S. Nursing

Industry

Healthcare Staffing

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Performance Guarantees: As your trusted partner, USN is the only staffing agency to guarantee delivery of experienced clinicians at the start of your facility's work stoppage. Along with guaranteeing delivery of experienced healthcare professionals to continue patient care, USN will ensure quality metrics are met throughout the stoppage, providing critical reporting to provide complete visibility to data throughout the duration of the work stoppage.

On-Site Operation Management: USN knows statuses can change by the minute during a work stoppage. Our experienced executive team will be on-site to stay up-to-the-minute on all details of the project. Our expert team can also advise administrators on labor notices, stopgap planning and staffing scenarios for various notice timelines and potential work stoppage sizes.

We believe hospitals can negotiate from a position of strength if they thoroughly plan for all possible work stoppage scenarios. USN is the ultimate partner in helping you develop a contingency plan that hits all levels of management that you might need.

You don't have to face a work stoppage alone. Call us today to learn more about how we can partner to ensure you are prepared for anything.