

Patient Advocacy

The Issue: The Right of Nurses and Health Professionals to Be Patient Advocates.

Our patients know that their best advocate for safe and effective health care is their nurse by the bedside. Unfortunately, in a health care system often driven by bottom-line decision making, our patients too often need that advocate. When cost-cutting and profits come first, patients and healthcare workers pay the price. Whether the issue is patient safety or worker safety, it has been unionized nurses and healthcare workers who speak up, at the bedside, in the community and to our elected officials.

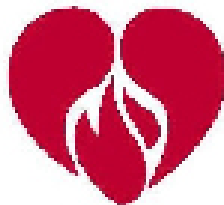
But what happens when that voice speaking up for patients is threatened or silenced? Within the next few months a decision is expected from the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) that could affect the rights of thousands of nurses to speak up when they believe patient care or their professional practice is threatened by policies or practices of their health care institution.

The NLRB may soon rule that hospitals can refuse to allow ‘charge’ nurses -- nurses who delegate patient assignments to others during their working shift -- the right to be in a union. Without that protection, the voices of our best patient advocates can be easily silenced. This decision could also affect other health professionals who take on additional responsibilities on behalf of their patients. Nurses and health professionals organize to have a voice in patient care decisions. When we lose the protection provided us by our union, our patients lose as well.

“When I take on more responsibility in my job, it’s for the benefit of my patients. Because of that, my hospital may try to take away the protection I have through my union to speak up for my patients, and my colleagues. As unionized nurses, we fought for a contract that guarantees safe staffing and patient and worker safety standards. If I’m not protected – neither are my patients.”

What HPAE is Doing: Studies have found that unionized healthcare facilities perform measurably better than non-union facilities in dealing with specific traumas (such as heart attacks).¹ At least part of these findings are due to the role of a

HPAE



**SETTING THE
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health care union like HPAE in setting workplace and patient standards, in providing a system for workplace problem-solving, and in protecting the rights of professionals.

HPAE members have been active in a number of public fights on behalf of our professions and our patients. We have even been sued for our advocacy.

HPAE intends to fight to continue to give nursing and health professionals their voice – to speak up and improve our workplaces, to gain safe staffing, to provide safe and effective patient care.

Solution: Regardless of the decisions of federal courts, healthcare employers in New Jersey can choose to continue their collective bargaining relationship with nurses and other healthcare professionals. HPAE will ask that all of our health care employers agree to contract language that will continue to recognize the union rights of all nursing and health professionals. We ask that our elected officials and community leaders support us as we seek to protect our rights to be your advocates.

Endnotes:

1. Ash, M. and Seago, J.A., “The Effect of Registered Nurses’ Unions on Heart Attack Mortality,” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, Vol. 57, No.3 (April 2004)

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