

DON'T COMPLAIN, ORGANIZE!

Written by By Beth Blakeman Managing Editor
Friday, 20 August 2021 04:26



Doctors at Rehoboth McKinley Christian Hospital submitted signed union authorization cards to the National Labor Relations Board as a step toward forming a union in partnership with the Union of American Physicians and Dentists. The announcement came on Aug. 10.

The UAPD is an affiliate of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees International.

Dr. Stuart Bussey, the president of UAPD for almost 15 years, said a group of about 25 RMCH doctors has been talking to UAPD.com via Zoom over the past month.

The physician organizing committee at RMCH issued a public statement which was reproduced by the UAPD in its Aug. 10 press release.

“We have decided to unionize for one reason: to protect and improve the lives of our patients, without fear of reprisal for speaking up on their behalf.”

The challenges at RMCH are similar to those of many corporate health care workplaces, Bussey said. He described it as a transition from doctors in private practice working for themselves, to doctors as employees of big corporations, without control over the care they provide.

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Dr. Mary Poel, a pediatrician at the College Clinic, 2111 College Drive, who is acting as the spokesperson for the core group of RMCH physicians seeking to form a union, expressed concern over changes which occurred since Community Hospital Corporation of Plano, Tex. began managing RMCH.

"The powers that be should be meeting with the physicians with the different specialties instead of making arbitrary decisions that affect us," she said. "We have no way to have any input into those things."

Poel said doctors should have more of a say in how clinical decisions are reached. She said they are sometimes made based on financial considerations.

"We see it as our responsibility to make it safe in the hospital for patients," she said.

Poel mentioned the importance of being treated by qualified physicians and having enough doctors to cover the community.

While many of these issues have been under discussion, the impetus to form a union reached a critical point when the doctor representing the medical staff on the board was fired. He took his seat as the only doctor on the board in January and lasted in that position until July. Poel said the doctor was dismissed as a result of disagreements with the administration about patient care.

"That was the stimulus that we as a medical staff needed to do something," Poel said.

Medical assistants were also let go. Poel said that move left her clinic so short-handed that the staff can barely keep up.

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Another issue the group wants to review is the upkeep of hospital equipment and supplies.

On one floor the intensive care unit at RMCH relies on a system of bells in order to keep the nurse's station informed.

Bussey said the standard of care in a hospital is a call system which turns a light on in the nurse's station. The bells, he said, can't be heard above the noise in the ICU.

The bells are a form of cost-cutting, he said.

One of the doctors went online looking for a call system that wasn't very expensive, Poel said. Asked if it isn't the hospital's responsibility to cover such costs, she said that sometimes doctors have been known to contribute their own money.

At this time she is not aware of any plan to purchase a new call system.

WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU MAKE?

If the union is approved, Poel has a list of issues she would like to see addressed. The first thing she wants to know is where the money goes.

"The doctor's group as a whole would really like to see the financials of the hospital," she told

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the *Sun*. “Where is the money being spent?”

Doctors want to be part of prioritizing how funds are disbursed, she explained. They want to focus on patient safety, services, and having enough doctors available to provide great care for the outpatient clinics and the hospital.

Furthermore, the doctor who was terminated should come back, unless the administration can give reasons for the firing. Poel doesn't believe it had anything to do with clinical care or interactions with peers or patients.

One topic that was not part of the discussion was salaries. Both Poel and Rachel Flores, organizing director of UAPD, emphasized that the Zoom discussions about the desire to form a union centered around patient care.

Poel said the reason she was chosen to become the spokesperson for the core group seeking to form a union, was because there is a fear of reprisals by the administration.

“A lot of the younger doctors that are part of this ... they don't want to lose their jobs,” Poel said.

CHC has been asked to recognize the new union. Calls to the management company from the *Gallup*

Sun

Aug. 11 and 12 received no response.

The *Sun* also contacted RMCH Executive Director Ina Burmeister for comment, and was informed that something would be forthcoming. However, no response was received by press time.

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