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UC Completes First Round of Scheduled Labor Negotiations with Nurses Union

UC, CNA exchange proposals on wages, break issues, health benefits

The University of California (UC) ended its first round of scheduled labor negotiations with the California Nurses Association (CNA) today in Sacramento, Calif. The session, which kicked off this past Monday, was a "reopener" of four specific issues – wages, health benefits, meal and break periods and retiree health plans – that were mutually agreed upon by UC and the CNA during last December's contract agreement between the university and its more than 8,500 nurses.

"Our nurses are one of our most critical assets and provide only the highest quality of patient care every day," said Howard Pripas, UC director of labor relations. "We are looking forward to finding solutions with the CNA to address nurses' needs. This session was a step in the right direction, and we hope that upcoming sessions will lead to a mutually beneficial solution for the university and our nurses."

The four planned bargaining sessions between UC and the CNA will address the concerns of nurses at the university's five major medical centers and ten student health clinics. Each open topic was addressed by both parties, including an exchange of initial wage proposals.

In its opening statement and responses, UC negotiators proposed:

- **A continued commitment to remain market competitive with regard to RN wages.**
UC presented a statewide survey of nurse wages that showed UC either leads or is at the market average for RN wages in most locations. In addition, the university reminded the CNA that UC exceeds the market average for paid holidays and exceeds important competitors in retirement benefits.

"UC is committed to remaining competitive in the salary market to attract and retain RNs and this data reflects our success in doing so," said Pripas. "UC prides itself in having a staff of exceptional nurses and our goal is to maintain that standard."

Any salary increases agreed upon during negotiations will be on top of the significant wage increases UC has implemented during the past several months.
- **Safeguarding the standard of healthcare enjoyed by all UC employees.**
UC currently provides a variety of outstanding and affordable healthcare plans for more than 100,000 employees, including nurses, faculty, environmental services, management and other healthcare professionals. The plans use a salary-based approach, in which lower paid employees

pay less while receiving the same coverage as others, a system that was approved by all unions affiliated with UC at the time of its passage.

CNA has demanded a free health plan for nurses, and they demanded that UC keep all current health plans at the same cost through next year regardless of whether actual health care costs increase. UC is unwilling to provide this type of coverage to just one group of employees if it cannot provide it to all of its employees. UC continues to look for alternative approaches and encourages a collaborative approach from CNA in developing mutually beneficial solutions. UC must consider the feasibility of implementing coverage changes on a system-wide level, which is largely based on state funding, and not coverage available solely to nurses.

– **Ensuring that meal and break periods are appropriately accommodated, while maintaining the flexibility to care for patients.**

UC recognizes that meal and break periods are important to both parties, but because of patient care needs, nurses occasionally are unable to take them.

The CNA proposed to implement a cost penalty of one hour pay for any 15-minute break period missed. Implementation of the CNA's penalty system would require the university to become more directly involved in managing the time of individual RNs, closely monitoring breaks and patient care activity, in order to avoid possible unanticipated increases in salary costs. This type of rigid proposal will make it difficult to maintain the flexibility necessary to care for the patients who rely on nurses.

– **A commitment to the current retirement health benefit plan for current working nurses.**

Barring any changes in legislative or regulatory requirements, or changes in the health care marketplace that directly affect the plans offered (such as a merger among the plans UC offers), the University will make no change to the retiree health plans through June 30, 2007, including the benefits within those plans, unless changes are made in current employee health benefits. Consistent with current practice, annual adjustments in retiree contributions will be made to reflect the increased costs of providing retiree health benefits and any change in state funding levels.

Negotiations between UC and the CNA will continue during three additional bargaining sessions scheduled for May 1 – 3 in San Diego, May 15 – 17 in Westwood and May 30 – June 1 in Irvine.

For more information about the university's negotiations with CNA: www.ucnurses.com or http://atyourservice.ucop.edu/employees/policies/labor_relations/index.html.

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