

## Little Company of Mary nurses to strike Friday in Torrance over staffing complaints

By Nick Green , Daily Breeze

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More than 700 nurses at Providence Little Company of Mary Medical Center in Torrance will stage a one-day strike Friday to raise public awareness over what they contend are unsafe staffing levels that compromise patient care.

[The nurses, who unionized in September 2013 over exactly the same concern](#), have been negotiating their first labor contract since March 2014 without success, union officials said.

“It is a long time,” said Charles Idelson, communications director with National Nurses United. “Employers that are dedicated to reaching a fair agreement with their employees do not drag out negotiations with their employees.”

Nurses plan to begin picketing at 7 a.m. Friday and will hold an 8 a.m. rally outside the Torrance Boulevard medical center.

Shiela Mercado, a nurse for 15 years at the Torrance hospital and member of the negotiating team, said <http://100tophospitals.com/studies-winners/100-top-hospitals-winners>>Little Company of Mary has a large banner hanging on the building proclaiming that it was named one of the top 100 large community medical centers in the nation.

</URL>“The nurses are the heart of the hospital,” she said. “Without the nurses, do you think we would have reached the (list of) top 100 hospitals? It’s time for the public to know there are problems going on. ... Not much has changed since we were organizing.”

Providence, which cited its recent [2015 patient safety excellence award](#), said in a statement that it has a “contingency plan” in place.

Spokeswoman Patricia Aidem did not elaborate on what those plans are.

In the statement, Providence contended it has negotiated in good faith and offered a “competitive” compensation package.

“While we respect employees’ right to participate in a strike, we are disappointed this is the action the union is taking and know it would be more constructive to get back to bargaining,” the company said.

The walkout is one of several at eight hospitals in Southern and Northern California as well as Chicago next week called by the California Nurses Association and National Nurses United. About 6,400 nurses will walk off the job. In Torrance, 740 nurses will strike.

The issues of understaffing that are the sticking point in Torrance are similar nationwide.

“Nurses want management to respect the nurses,” said Torrance surgical unit registered nurse Judy Chang. “We want improvement in safe staffing and the delivery of safe patient care.”

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Mercado said nurses often don’t even have time to eat a quick meal on a 15-minute break during 12-hour shifts because no one else is available to look after their patients.

Nurses are so overworked that turnover is an issue, Mercado said. Newly hired ones tend to leave after a couple of years for medical facilities that have better working conditions.

Torrance registered nurse Maria Vazquez, who cares for cancer patients, said nurses should not be seen as commodities.

“The experience of each nurse must be valued because the safety for each patient depends on knowledgeable nurses,” she said. “It’s important to retain our newer nurses so they can become a well-rounded, experienced RN. The strike vote will send a strong message to Providence that RNs are serious about fighting for patient care.”



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