

September 1, 2020

David Schultz, Senior Vice President, Operations  
CHI St. Michael Medical Center  
4205 Wheaton Way, Suite A  
Bremerton, WA 98310

Dear Mr. Schultz:

The recent COVID-19 outbreak at Harrison is distressing to all of us. Many of our members are frightened for their safety and the safety of their families, as well as their patients and community. It is troubling that we have been raising concerns about personal protective equipment, notification of exposure, and other safety issues for many months before this outbreak occurred. We wish there was more of a focus on listening to the dedicated health care workers serving on the front lines of this pandemic as you make decisions about safety policies and protocols. The seriousness of this outbreak may well have been limited had more workers and the union been fully notified in its earliest stages.

We continue to be alarmed by reports from workers at St. Michael that they do not feel safe in the workplace during this outbreak. I would like to outline for you the beginning steps of what we need for workers to be safe:

**Rapid COVID testing results for all workers.** We have heard that many patients received rapid COVID tests while some workers waited for test results for 5 days or more. Some workers have inappropriately been notified of their test results by their managers instead of by Employee Health. Health care workers are rightly concerned about their own health and their families', which has been put in jeopardy by this outbreak, as well as whether it is safe for them to be working with patients while waiting to learn their COVID status. We all know that this outbreak cannot be dealt with unless test results are returned in as short a timeframe as possible, so that smart decisions can be made about worker and patient safety and infection control. We expect these test result lag times to improve immediately.

**8-hour written notification of any potential exposure, as outlined in our existing Memorandum of Agreement dated March 15.** We are hearing from many, many workers concerned that they have not been notified of exposures at all, let alone in writing within 8 hours as outlined in our agreement. I remind you that the agreement has not been altered or amended by the presence of an outbreak and requires:

*"The Employer will provide all nurses or healthcare workers who have been exposed, such as treating a patient who was not confirmed, but later is to have COVID-19 with written notice within eight (8) hours of known exposure. The written notice will include: the date of exposure, assessment of exposure risk and Employer decision on whether to permit the nurse or healthcare worker to work or placed on paid leave."*

As a reminder, your staff are experts on infection control, PPE, and what constitutes an exposure, and their assessments of their exposures and exposure risks should be taken extremely seriously.

**Paid administrative leave after a COVID test until receiving results (whether symptomatic or asymptomatic) and during the full length of any quarantine.** Anyone who is waiting for COVID test results or is in any form of quarantine or isolation after an exposure, potential exposure, or positive test result, regardless of whether or not they are symptomatic, should be placed on paid administrative leave for the full duration of their quarantine or their wait for results. Workers should not be punished for the hospital experiencing an outbreak, and no one should be forced to choose between working a shift without knowing if they could infect patients or going without pay. To get this outbreak under control workers must be made whole for missed work hours.

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*Our mission is to build a powerful Union that fights for economic, political and social justice in our workplaces and in our communities.*

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**Maintaining safe staffing levels during staff shortages.** I'm sure we can agree that safe staff-to-patient ratios are not optional, no matter what else is going on in the hospital. We are aware that many workers are quarantined and unable to work. We have heard multiple reports of some truly frightening ratios in recent days. It also appears there is a problem with health care workers being forced to work overtime hours just to keep staffing levels as safe as they can. We have also heard some managers who are able to provide patient care are choosing not to pick up shifts even as staffing levels drop dangerously, adding to the pressure on our members to work overtime. Staffing levels must be addressed immediately and returned to safe levels in every department and on every shift, before any patients or staff come to harm.

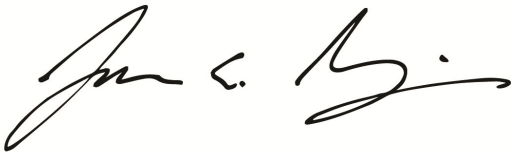
**Adequate PPE for all workers.** We have been bringing this issue up since March and it does not appear to have gotten meaningfully better. We have even provided PPE donations to the hospital ourselves. Workers continue to report broken, cracked, untested, and ill-fitting PAPRs. Workers continue to report that they are expected to reuse N95 masks until they are destroyed, sometimes for weeks on end. Others have been refused fit testing. Still others report that PPE required for their safety is inaccessible to them even though it is supposedly in stock. Inaccessible PPE is not much better than nonexistent PPE, especially during emergencies like patient codes. We realize there has been a national shortage of PPE. But you have repeatedly told the state and the public that you are well-supplied with PPE, yet workers report otherwise. We see no reason why any worker would report a lack of protective equipment to their union or employer unless there is a real problem. It is always unacceptable—doubly so during a pandemic, and now during an outbreak at the hospital—to ask any worker to perform their job without proper protective equipment. We need to know every worker has all the equipment they need for every shift, every patient, and every procedure. As you are aware you are not permitted to open for non-urgent procedures unless you have adequate PPE, and that means PPE that is in good repair, in sufficient numbers, tested for safety, and available to workers.

**Hazard pay for all workers.** At this point, any argument that workers at St. Michael are not being asked to perform hazardous duty at work is insulting. It is unfortunate that this outbreak has occurred. But 30+ positive cases on staff and scores more in quarantine only demonstrates the true danger in their workplace. Our members have repeatedly asked for hazard pay while facing a once-in-a-century pandemic, and we reiterate the call for fair pay during these particularly hazardous working conditions. This would certainly help with staff retention and recruitment, which would mean safer staffing and better patient care.

I look forward to working with you to achieve all these goals as soon as possible. Thank you.



Faye Guenther, UFCW 21 President



Joe Mizrahi, UFCW 21 Secretary-Treasurer