



One strong, united voice for nurses and patients

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April 17, 2020

Re: The Need for a COVID-19 Contract: The New York State Nurses Association and Albany Medical Center's Response to the COVID-19 Outbreak in the Capital Region

Dear Dr. McKenna and Ms. Carey:

We are writing you today in the face of an unprecedented healthcare crisis that the world has not seen in over 100 years. The COVID-19 outbreak forces all of us to view the world through a new lens, where past disputes and grievances need to be put to rest in favor of exclusively focusing on our communities' health.

This letter is a direct appeal to you both to view the world differently with us, and work closely with the New York State Nurses Association (NYSNA) in the next year.

The case for a COVID Contract

NYSNA and Albany Medical Center (AMC) have been engaged in tough bargaining over the last year and a half. Together, we have also faced an unprecedented crisis in our community. We believe that by working together we can continue to provide the best care to the capital region and beyond:

The attached proposals settle all disputes and set us up for a one-year COVID Contract. We feel the COVID Contract accomplishes four urgent goals:

- 1) The COVID Contract focuses both parties on the urgent patient care needs of Capital Region patients. **By establishing agreed upon staffing levels, practice committees, and health and safety measures, we will have a structure that defends the community's health and defeats the virus.**

- 2) The COVID-19 virus has exacted a heavy physical and emotional toll on all nurses and healthcare workers who are responding to the crisis. Employers across New York State are recognizing and rewarding their NYSNA nurses for their courage, commitment, and constancy in the face of COVID-19, even though they already have established Contracts that spell out wages and benefits. **Agreeing to our fair COVID-19 wage plan establishes wages that recognize the nurses' extraordinary work circumstances. Their service to the community is surely unquestioned.**

- 3) **Following the leadership of Governor Cuomo, who extended the New York State of Health coverage options until May 15, 2020 due to the COVID-19 outbreak, AMC should reopen enrollment and reduce premium costs for coverage for the nurses and their families.** NYSNA's own internal data shows that at least 3 nurses have tested positive for COVID-19, dozens have been treated as Patients Under Investigation, and hundreds have been unsafely exposed to COVID-19 at AMC. Nurses are clearly becoming vectors for the virus in their communities and especially among their families. **Accepting our proposal for affordable insurance coverage has never been more urgent.**

- 4) **Improving the morale of the nurse workforce at AMC must be the top priority of AMC and NYSNA.** Settling a COVID Contract with NYSNA sends the clear message to the nurses that you care about them and want to equal the commitment they have given, and continue to give, during the COVID crisis.

The Upstate COVID Nurse Corps and Deeper Collaboration

It is our understanding that dozens of nurses are currently furloughed at AMC. This is based on the opinion that the census and current case load do not necessitate a full complement of RN staffing hospital wide. We disagree with that assessment. However, we believe there is an opportunity for us to work together to provide relief for nurse colleagues in other parts of the state who are on the front lines of battling the COVID-19 pandemic. Our request is simple: Join with NYSNA and other Upstate Union facilities in creating the Upstate COVID Nurse Corps.

AMC nurses and other furloughed Upstate nurses are ready to join the frontlines of the outbreak in the New York City metropolitan area. We want to immediately enact a program that includes you, available nurses with relevant competencies, and other healthcare partners.

Downstate employers will provide travel, housing, and training for nurses to join the COVID-19 fight. AMC can play a critical role in providing the workforce that helps end the COVID-19 surge in New York City, and we would be prepared to send nurses to AMC from downstate union facilities when the Capital Region surge occurs.

This is the type of collaboration we hope to model for years to come. Albany Medical Center is a pillar of the Upstate healthcare delivery system. We know we can make a difference in New York's health when we work together in our communities' greatest time of need.

Defeating COVID-19 Together

We hope you find the terms of our COVID Contract acceptable. Please join us by looking at the healthcare landscape differently through the lens of COVID-19, agreeing that your nurses deserve a contract during these times, and saying yes to moving on from past disputes.

There is great power in saying yes to this COVID Contract. We can defeat the virus together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pat Kane". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pat Kane, RN, CNOR
NYSNA Executive Director

NYSNA-AMC Bargaining Committee