Swedish Offers Proposals on Caregiver Safety, Low Census; Next Bargaining Set for Dec. 30

The bargaining team for Swedish Medical Center and Swedish Edmonds held a thirteenth “main table” bargaining session with SEIU 1199NW on Monday, December 9. To keep momentum going at the bargaining table, Swedish and the union have been trying to schedule at least one additional session during December. Swedish proposed holding the next main-table session on December 30, and the union has agreed. Swedish would also like to convene at least one “side table” bargaining session during December to spur additional progress, but those details are still under discussion.

Recognizing that caregiver safety is a top concern for both Swedish and the union, the Swedish team presented a summary of some of the ongoing efforts to ensure Swedish is the safest possible workplace, including enhanced security coverage in the First Hill and Cherry Hill emergency departments. The team also acknowledged that more work is planned and needed and reiterated Swedish’s desire to partner with SEIU to develop workable solutions. We ended our presentation with a proposal for new language around caregiver safety that empowers a safety subcommittee to recommend next steps for personal safety alert systems (determining which units currently have them and the appropriate prioritization for units without them) and to prioritize units that will receive expanded safe patient handling and de-escalation training. We also included our previously proposed $25,000 budget for the committee that would be earmarked solely for the committee’s travel and time to visit other hospital systems and recommend best practices.
Staffing is another top concern for both Swedish and SEIU, and one of the most challenging issues to address due to the significant shortage of qualified health care professionals in the labor market. As of November, Swedish had more than 700 open union-represented positions. Swedish has made clear that SEIU’s proposal to add more than 2,000 RN and NAC full-time equivalents (FTEs) is simply not reasonable, and we re-emphasized our desire to partner together to fill vacancies and identify ways to improve the work experience of our caregivers. The Swedish team gave a presentation during the session that summarized ongoing staffing and recruitment efforts and results, including the good news that our first-year turnover rate among RNs is lower than the US healthcare average and continues to decline. We believe the first step to resolving staffing concerns is to fill the vacancies within our current FTE allotment.

**Swedish Offers Low Census Proposal and Other Measures**

Swedish is hopeful that tentative agreements can be reached soon on less controversial issues. Reaching agreements on topics where there is significant common ground can help clear the way for negotiating on more difficult issues. In that spirit, we offered a proposal to adjust the low census fund as well as a package of proposals related to issues where we think we can easily reach agreements with the union.

Currently, Swedish provides a low census fund to pay caregivers who want to work during periods of low census. The union has said that the hours covered by the fund are insufficient. We have heard the union’s concerns. In response, we have proposed a compromise that would result in an overall increase in hours in the funds and would base the amount of the fund on the number of FTEs in the RN and Technical bargaining units and a flat increase to 2500 hours for the Service contract. The low census fund is an important safety net for our caregivers, and we have been proud that through ongoing diligence we have not exhausted our funds in several years. Despite not having exhausted the funds in the past few years we agreed to raise the fund amounts to try to get closure on this issue. SEIU did not respond and we are hopeful they will accept the changes at our next session.
Separately, we also offered a package of several proposals Swedish had previously put on the table to address areas that are relatively noncontroversial, with one significant change. This package includes modifying the bargaining unit roster to reflect the current process and updating the lactation language to be compliant with the law. We also agreed to provide more information to SEIU on our new caregivers than we currently provide and included our previous proposal to update our TB language to be compliant with CDC recommendations. There is also a significant modification to how we currently handle caregiver discipline, with our new proposal allowing for caregivers to have oral and written warnings removed from their files in 2 years upon request versus our current 3 years for written warnings, as long as there is not subsequent discipline on the issue.

It was important for us to offer these proposals as a package proposal (requiring agreement on all pieces of the package) because despite our agreements to do more than the current language requires, SEIU continues to have asks on some of the noncontroversial issues, such as its proposal for Swedish to provide ethnicity data, personal phone numbers and personal emails as part of our regular employee rosters that we give to them. We believe it is time for compromise and movement. We also think that after nine months of bargaining we should have more than one tentative agreement.

**Union Responds on Proposed Wage Increases**

Wage increases have been one of the most challenging areas of disagreement between Swedish and SEIU. In October, we brought a new set of proposals to the bargaining table that offered significant economic enhancements, including higher annual wage increases. Our new proposal improved our offer to 2.5%, 2.5%, 2.0% and 2.0%. The initial increase would be effective the first full pay period following ratification. With this higher wage increase, Swedish’s offer compares well with agreements SEIU has reached with other health care providers in the market. We made that move despite SEIU not changing from their initial wage proposal until December 9.
In its new wage proposal, SEIU has modestly reduced its annual wage increase request. The initial proposal was 7.0%, 6.0% and 5.0%. The union’s new proposal is 6.75% retroactive to July 1, 2019; 5.75% starting July 1, 2020; 5.0% in 2021; and 5.75% in 2022, with the new contract expiring October 31, 2022. The Swedish bargaining team is reviewing the proposal and will respond at a future date. We think it worth noting that no SEIU 1199NW agreement, and no agreement with any other major health care organization in the area, has included across-the-board wage increases of this size.

Looking Ahead to More Bargaining

In addition to holding a main-table session on December 30, Swedish remains hopeful that we can schedule at least one side-table session with SEIU in December to discuss key issues such as the Case Management Social Worker/ARS counselor agreement, standby/call and float. SEIU has said it would participate in side-table sessions only if Swedish provides additional funding to cover the union’s costs, having exhausted the funds that Swedish has already provided to the union for bargaining. Swedish is considering that condition set by SEIU and the two sides will continue the conversation.

Although progress has been slow, we remain optimistic that we can reach agreement at the bargaining table if both sides continue to negotiate in good faith and work hard to listen to each other’s concerns and priorities.

Keeping You Informed

We are here to answer your questions and discuss the issues you care about. We welcome your questions by email at communications@swedish.org. Please also look to Labor Negotiation News for the latest updates after each bargaining session.
2019 Contract Negotiations Bargaining Team

Below is a list of members of the Swedish bargaining team, with each member identified by the contract s/he represents:

- Jan Flom, Director Nursing Services – Edmonds RN and Pro/Tech
- Julie Norman, Senior Manager Guest Services Cafeteria – Edmonds Pro/Tech
- Rhose Hipolito, Nurse Manager Surgical Telemetry Cherry Hill – SMC RN and Service
- Wendy Connors, Manager Emergency Department Ballard – SMC RN and Service
- Brian Trickel, Chief Nursing Officer Issaquah/Redmond – SMC RN, Service and Tech
- Marci Mann, Director Nursing Services Acute Care First Hill – SMC RN and Service
- Erika Watkinson, Nurse Manager Gyn Surgical First Hill – SMC RN and Service
- Sheri Love, Director Periop Services First Hill – SMC RN, Tech and Service
- Denise Dollar, Manager Respiratory Care Pulmonary Function – SMC Tech and Edmonds Pro/Tech
- Candi Johnson, Director Systems Nutrition Services – SMC Service
- Larisa Cummings, Director Patient Access Services – SMC Service
- Doug Green, Director Systems Environmental Services – SMC Service
- John Weir, Senior Manager Environmental Services Multi-Site – SMC Service
- Rose Van Wyk Coesens, Manager of the Breast Imaging Center Edmonds – Edmonds Pro/Tech
- Gwyn Anglin, Manager Medical Imaging Ballard – SMC Tech and Service
- Kristi Hester, Regional Senior Manager of Starbucks – SMC Service and EDM Pro/Tech
- Shelley Livingston, Labor Relations Director
- Melissa Norwood, HR Director
- Dan Mueller, VP Senior Labor/Employment Counsel
• John Hauge, VP Senior Labor/Employment Counsel

If you have feedback for the team on contract changes you would like to see, please reach out to your bargaining team representative.