Swedish Proposes More Bargaining Sessions in December to Speed Progress in Negotiations

The bargaining team for Swedish Medical Center and Swedish Edmonds held a twelfth “Main Table” bargaining session with SEIU 1199NW on Monday, November 18. This latest session came on the heels of SEIU’s announcement on November 15 that its members had voted to authorize a strike. Notwithstanding the union’s announcement, we remain hopeful that we can reach agreement at the bargaining table while recognizing there is still a lot of work to be done.

With the larger team negotiations being held approximately once a month at this time, Swedish suggested the parties also meet for “Side Table” sessions on December 3 and December 5 to discuss key issues such as the Case Management Social Worker/ARS counselor agreement, standby/call and float. The bargaining team hopes this process will ignite interest at the union table and help build momentum heading into the “Main Table” bargaining session confirmed on December 9. At the time of publication, Swedish was waiting for a response from SEIU.

Between bargaining sessions, Swedish has worked hard to provide caregivers with accurate information about our proposals and respond to caregivers’ questions. We also listened closely to caregivers to better understand their priorities and concerns. Through this listening process, we received important feedback from caregivers and used that feedback to make targeted improvements to our initial proposals despite not receiving counter proposals from the union. We did this on October 21, when we put forth a new
package with higher annual wage increases and new funds to support caregivers in developing solutions to workplace issues during the terms of the next contract. And we continued to propose targeted improvements at our last session.

**Swedish Offers a Modified Time-off Benefits Proposal**

In its initial package presented on June 25, Swedish proposed a transition from the current program of separate vacation and sick leave to a new paid time off (PTO)/short term disability (STD) system, beginning in 2021. This new system would provide caregivers two to ten more days of planned time off each year, depending on years of service. We also proposed a new short-term disability benefit and paid parental leave benefit, paid by Swedish, to offer caregivers a stronger financial safety net when they need to be away from work due to illness or injury or to care for a sick family member.

Under this proposal, caregivers with accrued sick leave would have their sick-leave banks frozen at the end of 2020 and would be able to use any unused sick hours through the end of 2022. We anticipate most caregivers will use up their frozen sick-leave banks within that timeframe. However, we also recognize that may not be the case for caregivers who have accrued hundreds of hours of sick leave over many years of service. We know there are caregivers who do not want to lose those large sick-leave banks. **In response, at the November 18 session, Swedish brought forward a modified PTO proposal allowing caregivers with at least 20 years of service to use their accrued sick leave through the remainder of their time working at Swedish.** Specifically, we proposed:

“Effective 1/1/2021, [caregivers] with 20 or more years of service as of 12/31/20 will have their Sick banks frozen and grandfathered for use for all purposes currently allowed as well as topping off new short term disability or Washington Paid Family and Medical Leave benefits for the duration of their continuous employment.”
When Swedish proposed this new language during the bargaining session there was no immediate response from SEIU. But we are hopeful union members will see the modified PTO proposal as a sign of our commitment to continuing good-faith negotiations.

**Swedish Clarifies Health Plan Language**

Swedish also offered a proposal to clear up confusion about proposed changes to the health, dental and vision plans presently on the table.

**Health Benefits**

Swedish is keeping the same three medical plan options – the Swedish PPO, HSA and Kaiser HMO. PPO premiums will remain the same throughout the life of the contract.

**Swedish is also keeping all of the health services it currently covers.** Some of you may recall that in 2015 Swedish added language to the contract about specific new services covered by its health plans, such as transgender health services. Those services are currently written into the health plans that Swedish will continue to offer under the new contract. Because those services are specified in the health plan, we did not think they needed to be stated in the contract we are currently negotiating. However, this has led to questions about whether Swedish is eliminating those services from its health plans. To be clear, we are maintaining them without any changes.

**Dental Benefits**

Swedish’s proposal includes the same two Delta Dental plans that are offered today, plus a third dental option, a Dental HMO, beginning in 2021.

**Vision Plan**

The vision plan will become voluntary and fully paid for by caregivers, at a cost of approximately $3 per pay period. The vision plan is offered with dependent and family coverage options as well as caregiver only options.
Swedish Suggests Staffing Conversations as a Path Forward

The staffing conversation remains the most difficult gap to bridge at the bargaining table. Swedish shares the concerns of our caregivers over staffing and patient safety, but we disagree with SEIU’s proposed answer to the problem. SEIU continues to push its proposal to add more than 2,000 RN and NAC full-time equivalents (FTEs), which is simply not feasible. Swedish currently has 732 open union-represented positions, including openings in many patient care classifications, that we are unable to fill due to the shortage of qualified health care professionals. If we cannot fill the current open positions, it is unrealistic to expect that we can fill thousands more, as SEIU is demanding. Rather than agree to a proposal that is unreasonable and unrealistic, we have made clear to the union that we want to partner with caregivers to find realistic and achievable solutions to challenges around staffing, recruitment and retention. We want to start a constructive conversation about how we can all partner together to fill vacancies and identify ways to improve the work experience of our caregivers.

Swedish is continuing to demonstrate at the bargaining table that we are serious about having these conversations, creating partnerships and reaching an agreement that reflects our core values and the best interest of caregivers. We are disappointed in SEIU’s current approach to the bargaining process and we are hopeful they will soon join us in working to bargain a contract we can all feel good about.

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:

- Jean Doerge, Chief Nursing Officer – Edmonds RN and Pro/Tech
- 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.