

Lake View Hospital's Response to The Open Letter to the Community  
7/20/2022

Lake View carefully reviewed the *Open Letter to the Community* from "The nurses of Lake View Hospital in Two Harbors" that was published in the North Shore Journal on July 15, 2022. This letter did not include the individual names of the nurses represented, or who submitted the letter on their behalf. On July 20, 2022, we were made aware that the same letter was submitted to another local newspaper by a representative of the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA) in collaboration with 18 staff nurses employed by Lake View and represented by the MNA. This letter does not represent our RNs who work in the medical clinic, population health program, RNs in clinical IT, foot care, and/or our community wellness program. The letter from the MNA and 18 staff nurses also does not represent all of the other nurses/clinical staff who work at Lake View, including LPNs, nursing assistants, or clinical assistants.

The current collective bargaining agreement between Lake View and the MNA is set to expire on September 30, 2022. Essentia Health and St. Luke's Hospital in Duluth are currently in negotiations with the MNA and the staff nurses they represent. More specific information on the contract negotiations between St. Luke's and the MNA can be found at [www.yourcaredestination.com](http://www.yourcaredestination.com).

Lake View will address the statements presented in the *Open Letter to the Community*. They are as follows:

Lake View does not have a nurse staffing crisis, and we are not operating with a skeleton crew of nurses, as the letter asserts. In a collaborative effort earlier this year between our nursing leadership and staff nurses, we jointly agreed to post an additional nurse shift for days and evenings during the busy summer months to minimize potential call outs for the scheduled on-call nurse and/or additional nursing staff. Lake View's nurse staffing of the inpatient unit and emergency department, in partnership with our staff nurses, has never compromised the safety of our patients in either area. We are proud to deliver high-quality and safe patient care before and throughout the pandemic.

Lake View's staff nurses have worked hard over the past two plus years, along with every other health care team member at Lake View. We experienced increased patient volumes in many areas, unique challenges with COVID-19 testing, vaccination, and treatment. Our health care system provided all employees with a monetary appreciation bonus in December of 2021, we maintained regular staff nurse FTE/schedules and full wages during the state shutdown, offered sick-time benefits to support COVID-19 isolation and quarantine, and provided many other employee appreciation benefits over the past two-plus years. Lake View has also encouraged our staff nurses, and all frontline workers, to apply for the Minnesota Frontline Worker Pay being offered by the state.

The staff nurse group at Lake View recently declined an incentive bonus program offered by Lake View to support the agreed upon staffing model for this summer. The incentive bonus requested by the staff nurses/MNA is not equitable or fair to our hard-working employees across our entire organization. Their bonus request alone (not factoring in their regular hourly

rates of pay, overtime rates, shift differentials, and/or other bonuses outlined in the current collective bargaining agreement) would be more than the regular hourly rate of pay for 67% of all other Lake View staff.

Lake View has been very fortunate to maintain our team of staff nurses throughout the pandemic, and we have not lost veteran nurses. In fact, Lake View had only three scheduled staff nurse departures since the beginning of the pandemic. One former hospital staff nurse now works in our medical clinic, one staff nurse retired after a 40+ year career at Lake View, and one new staff nurse resigned during her orientation period for personal family reasons.

We hired six additional staff nurses since the start of the pandemic, coming from hospitals like St. Luke's and Essentia Health in Duluth and elsewhere. Our experience of nurse retention and recruitment has been significantly more favorable than many other hospitals in our region and across the state.

Lake View continues to recruit additional staff nurses to support our hospital, ED, and ambulatory teams as we continue to grow. We recently hired one additional full-time staff nurse, and we have two additional part-time staff nurse positions posted. We are recruiting to support the planned future expansion of our infusion therapy services, future expansion of surgery and procedures, and to support increased vacation requests during the summer months at Lake View. Recruitment of RNs and other health care professionals is very challenging at this time, but we will continue doing everything possible, including offering signing bonuses, to recruit more staff nurses and other health care employees to Lake View to support our hard-working teams as we continue to grow.

Lake View has not become a "divert destination" for our area hospitals as presented in the letter. Divert occurs when a larger, tertiary hospital temporarily puts a hold on patient admissions and/or acceptance of ER patients due to a lack of physical beds, staffing challenges, a lack of other required resources, etc. This has been a significant issue impacting many of the urban, tertiary hospitals across the state of Minnesota during the pandemic. Throughout the pandemic, Lake View continued to accept swing bed patients (skilled nursing facility patients located in a Critical Access Hospital), and we also accepted a limited number of lateral transfer patients from our partners at St. Luke's when we had staffed beds available. This agreement allowed St. Luke's to free up some of their inpatient beds in order to accept critically ill patients who required a higher level of care from Lake View and from other rural hospitals across the region. There were numerous instances when Lake View's nursing leadership appropriately declined specific lateral transfer requests due to staffing concerns and/or other resource limitations. Lake View was also required to keep some ED and hospital patients longer than we would have pre-pandemic due to the tertiary hospitals being on divert. Lake View and other area hospitals all stepped up to serve patients in their time of need throughout the pandemic.

Lake View's Guardian of Excellence Award for patient experience in 2021 was a result of the extraordinary work from every single employee in our hospital, medical clinic, and retail pharmacy in Two Harbors, and our medical clinic in Silver Bay.

Lake View's nursing leadership and HR representatives are looking forward to continuing collaborative labor management meetings (LMC) and productive negotiations. The last LMC meeting scheduled for June 23, 2022 between Lake View and our staff nurses was cancelled by the MNA/staff nurses, and we have yet to receive a response to our requests for rescheduling. We are committed to future collaboration and partnership with our staff nurses to continue serving our patients and their families.

We assure you that Lake View is safely staffed in all departments, and we appreciate the trust the community has placed in our organization and in our entire health care team.

Thank you,

Greg Ruberg, President/CEO

Brad Alm, Director of Nursing

Beth Egan, Director of Primary Care & Specialty Services

Sarah Anderson, Nurse Manager

And the rest of Lake View's Leadership Team - Nate Cavallin, Christine Dearing, Josh Fuchs, Rachel Gischia, Lynnea Jones, Katie Klessig, Terri McDannold & Laura von Goertz