

To anyone it may concern -

My name is Sara Kruzel (I am a BSN/RN/OCN) and I have worked here at Hopkins since the summer in the Myeloma/Transplant/Lymphoma (MTL) oncology unit which also serves as our oncology ICU. I worked on the Bone Marrow Transplant unit for a year at Oregon Health and Science University (OHSU) as an RN before moving to the east coast. Just as a little background information, OHSU is a teaching hospital, like Hopkins, with a medical, nursing and dentistry school. Doernbecher Children's Hospital is part of OHSU as well. It is the #1 rated hospital in Oregon. As a nurse there, I worked under the Oregon Nurses Association (ONA) as a member of a nursing union. In light of all the word going around about unionizing, the pros and the cons, I wanted to quickly share some of my experiences as a unionized nurse because they have been nothing but positive and healthy.

In my job orientation when I heard I would be working under a union contract in Oregon, I knew nothing about them. I distinctly remember only thinking "isn't that the thing that makes you pay dues?" So I was not gung-ho going in. However, as I learned more about the union, what it meant for me in the workplace and between coworkers, I began to fall in love with the system and the rights and protection I felt it had for me as a nurse. Two simple but really important things about being a unionized nurse in 2016-2017 were as follows:

1. Our union contract felt to me as the ultimate problem solver for everyone. Staffing issue? Able to figure out at the drop of a hat. Didn't know who to grant a holiday or vacation to? Answers were right there. Issues in the workplace, from harassment to lack of personnel support? Strategies for handling and getting an answer were already in motion because we had a game plan for everything. Sick days, military leave, what I would be paid next year, how to go about when I eventually had to put in my notice for leaving. It seemed everything I was curious about, others were too, because the answers to my questions were right there in my contract. The gray area with my job was very minimal. And that was something that gave me great ease of mind and allowed me to do my job safely. It also took loads of stress off us as nurses because our contract supported our safety, well-being and fairness because WE created the contract.

2. With that, the contract was exactly that - OURS. When I was leaving we were going to the table to negotiate our next contract - and every week there were meetings that were open to the nursing public, where RNs could go in and vote on what we wanted to see or changed or what was a main concern. Pay, benefits, compensation, staffing - they were all figured out by the people it affected the most - US. Our contract was our voice. And since it was legally binding, our voice was protected.

I could go on, I really could about all the pros I saw with being a unionized nurse. And I can honestly say I saw and see no flaws. I know there's a lot of questions, different ways to look at it, etc. I know right now there IS a lot of gray area. All I can say personally is I think becoming a union would do nothing but empower us as nurses so we can continue to be the best for our patients, every single day. And at the end of it all, that's really what this is about.

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