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# Fountain Valley Regional Hospital nurses OK contract boosting wages up to 41%

The three-year agreement also includes measures to address severe understaffing



More than 800 registered nurses and other healthcare workers at Fountain Valley Regional Hospital & Medical Center authorized a strike, claiming they're shortstaffed, underpaid and scrambling to find needed equipment. (File photo: MICHAEL GOULDING, ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER)

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More than 800 registered nurses, physical therapists and other healthcare workers at [Fountain Valley Regional Hospital](#) have voted to ratify a three-year labor contract that includes big wage hikes and measures to address severe understaffing at the facility.

With 83% voting in favor, the ratification on Thursday, Dec. 1 marked the first contract the caregivers have negotiated as members of the [National Union of Healthcare Workers](#) (NUHW).

The 850 workers were previously represented by [United Nurses Associations of California](#) voted in March to decertify their association with UNAC, saying the union wasn't adequately addressing their concerns and opting instead to be represented by NUHW.

They have been in negotiations with the Tenet Healthcare-owned facility since June. The employees [authorized a strike](#) at the 400-bed hospital in October, but that was averted when the Dallas-based corporation began making labor concessions, union officials said.



Healthcare workers at Fountain Valley Regional Hospital have voted to ratify a three-year labor contract that includes big wage hikes and measures to address severe understaffing. The employees, represented by the National Union of Healthcare Workers, are seen casting their votes on Thursday, Dec. 1. (Photo courtesy of the National Union of Healthcare Workers)

“This contract is an important first step toward addressing the under-resourcing of our hospital that has forced far too many of our colleagues to leave and jeopardized the care our patients receive,” said Dianne Adams, a nurse at the hospital’s recovery room.

In a statement released Friday, Fountain Valley spokeswoman Jennifer Bayer said the agreement provides “long-term competitive compensation and a benefits package for our dedicated nurses and other professionals.”

The agreement includes:

—16% to 41% increases in starting wages, based on experience, tenure and position

—Cost of living raises ranging from 11% to 41%, with the average worker receiving a 17% boost over the course of the contract

—Measures to reduce turnover, including the restoration of a longevity bonus and a new pathway for registered nurses to advance to a higher classification with an additional wage increase

—Provisions to address violations of mandated nurse-staffing ratios and ensure enough nurses are on hand to avoid shift cancellations

Under the new contract, the pay rate for a licensed clinical social worker with eight years of experience will jump to \$60.94 an hour from \$43.52 an hour, a 40% increase over the life of the contract. That includes a 7% increase in the first year, a 6% hike in the second year and a 23.4% boost in the third year.

A clinical lab scientist with 14 years experience will get a 31.5% increase, rising to \$74.37 an hour from \$56.56 an hour.

Nurses say understaffing has been a chronic problem at Fountain Valley. They reported missing 31,000 meal breaks last year because shifts were not adequately staffed, union officials said.

“I’ve experienced many shifts where we didn’t have a break nurse, so we didn’t get a lunch or paid breaks,” said registered nurse Makenna Musson, a 27-year-old Aliso Viejo resident. “On my unit, each nurse is supposed to have five patients at the maximum. But there have been shifts where we’ll each have six or seven patients.”

Musson said that undermines patient care.

“When you’re spread that thin it’s impossible to provide the kind of care we should be giving,” she said.

NUHW also represents more than 700 medical technicians, nursing assistants, housekeepers and food service workers at the hospital, who won big raises and improved safety protections in [contracts](#) they negotiated last year.