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Tarzana hospital workers picket over wage and staffing concerns

Their union says they are paid, on average, 22% less than employees at other area hospitals



Healthcare workers at Providence Cedars-Sinai Tarzana Medical Center picketed the facility Wednesday, claiming they're understaffed and paid far less than employees doing the same work are other Southland hospitals. They are represented by the National Union of Healthcare Workers. (Photo by Hans Gutknecht, Los Angeles Daily News/SCNG)

By **KEVIN SMITH** | kvsmith@scng.com | San Gabriel Valley Tribune
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Healthcare workers at [Providence Cedars-Sinai Tarzana Medical Center](#) picketed the facility Wednesday, claiming they're understaffed and paid far less than employees doing the same work are other Southland hospitals.

The situation, they say, is putting patient care at risk.

Nearly 600 workers at the medical center — including licensed vocational nurses, nursing assistants, surgical and imaging technicians, respiratory therapists and housekeepers — authorized the picket after their contract expired Oct. 1.

They are represented by the [National Union of Healthcare Workers](#).



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Members of the National Union of Healthcare Workers picket in front of Providence Cedars-Sinai Tarzana Medical Center in on Wed, Dec 7, 2022. (Photo by Hans Gutknecht, Los Angeles Daily News/SCNG)



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Employees cite an NUHW report that shows Tarzana wages are 22% lower on average than nine comparable, unionized hospitals in the San Fernando Valley and Los Angeles County. (Photo by Hans Gutknecht, Los Angeles Daily News/SCNG)





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Employees say understaffing at the hospital is putting patient care at risk. (Photo by Hans Gutknecht, Los Angeles Daily News/SCNG)



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Wielding signs reading, “Patients before profits” and “Fair contract now,” the workers walked the picket line during their breaks, chanting “No contract, no peace!” and “4% won’t pay the rent!”

The protest came less than a week after [more than 700](#) SEIU-represented nurses, pharmacists, occupational therapists, social workers and speech-language pathologists at the hospital authorized a strike, saying they are also underpaid.

Jonathan Mexicanos, an NUHW-represented respiratory therapist, said the hospital initially said it would do “whatever was needed” to bring wages up to market rate, but recently announced pay increases would be capped at 10%.

“I also work at Los Robles Regional Medical Center and they pay me 25% more,” the 32-year-old Thousand Oaks resident said. “They value you for your work there, and they show it through the compensation. I have saved lives — it’s our job to do so. But to not value the work you do ... is demoralizing.”

In a statement issued Wednesday, Tarzana said its goal in continuing negotiations with NUHW is “to ensure caregivers are paid the market rate” and that both sides arrive at a contract that satisfies the needs of bargaining unit members and the hospital.

“We have made progress and expect to continue to move forward at our next session on Friday,” the statement said. “Nothing at this point is set in stone.”

Data gathered by NUHW show significant gaps between starting wages at Tarzana and the market rate for the same jobs.

The start rate for a physical therapy aide at Tarzana is \$15.81 an hour, for example, while the average market rate for that position is \$21.89 an hour.

Other starting wage examples:

- Emergency services technician — \$21.35 an hour at Tarzana, versus the average market rate of \$27.66 an hour
- Radiology Tech — \$30.36 an hour at Tarzana, versus the average market rate of \$41.16 an hour
- Phlebotomist — \$19.57 an hour at Tarzana, versus the average market rate of \$24.63 an hour
- Monitor technician — \$16.81 an hour at Tarzana, versus the average market rate of \$22.98 an hour

Koudjo Equida, a phlebotomist at the Tarzana hospital, said the lack of adequate staffing is a real issue.

“We’re never safely staffed because every month more people leave for jobs that provide better pay and less stress,” he said.

Mexicanos said the situation has been made worse by the hospital’s use of travel employees who are brought in to help fill gaps in staffing.

“Those people don’t have a personal investment in patients like we do, and they are getting paid substantially more than us,” he said.

Myrna King, a dietary technician at Tarzana, earns \$23 an hour. But it’s not enough.

“My rent is very high,” the 57-year-old Reseda resident said. “These raises would only be a penny to this company, which is making millions of dollars in profits.”

The hospital said it intends to continue negotiations and hopes to reach a resolution.

“The purpose of meeting at the bargaining table is to go back-and-forth in a respectful manner until we reach agreement,” management said.