

Ms. Cass:

As the presidents of the healthcare workers and nurses unions at Windham Hospital and Backus Hospital, we write to express our deep concern that Hartford HealthCare is putting patients at risk by keeping two of the three floors at Windham Hospital closed.

As you know, nurses at Windham hospital went on a two-day strike on September 22. It is now a week later, and Windham Hospital has refused to reopen 4 North (the Progressive Care Unit (“PCU”)) and Greer (the medical-surgical (“med-surg”) unit with telemetry capabilities). The only floor open is 4 East, which is the telemetry floor.

Instead of reopening the other units, Windham Hospital is putting high acuity patients that belong in a PCU on a telemetry floor where nurses cannot properly monitor them, and is sending patients to other hospitals. These are patients that we could care for if the PCU was open. Moreover, patients coming out of operation are being placed on the same floor as COVID patients. And because there are not enough rooms on this one unit, patients are now sharing rooms – a practice we have tried to avoid since the start of the pandemic.

Unsurprisingly, there are patients cohorting together testing positive for COVID. Hartford HealthCare’s refusal to open two of its three floors is also placing strains on other hospitals including Backus Hospital in Norwich and the Backus Hospital emergency department (“ED”) in Plainfield. Backus’ emergency departments usually admit some of its patients to Windham Hospital. Now patients are being held at Backus, and the EDs are overflowing. On September 27, there were seventy patients for thirty-three beds at the Norwich ED and twenty patients for twelve beds at the Plainfield ED. The halls were lined with beds because there were not enough rooms. And at least three patients were held for over 24 hours at the Plainfield ED waiting for a room. The Plainfield ED does not have proper dining services for stays that long, so patients’ diets end up being soup and other high sodium food we can microwave.

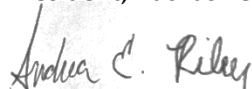
By keeping units closed and census low at Windham, it allows Hartford HealthCare to cancel nurses’ shifts after those nurses went on a two-day unfair labor practice strike. At the same time, nurses at Backus are being forced to work mandatory overtime with unsafe staffing ratios as the census surges. This harms nurses and patients alike.

We brought these concerns directly to management at Windham and Backus. We have received no reply from management, and nothing has been done. We therefore feel compelled to report our concerns to the Department of Public Health and urge you to use every legal means at the Department’s disposal to protect patients and encourage Hartford HealthCare and Windham Hospital to reopen their units to the community.

Sincerely,



Sherri Dayton, RN
President, Backus Federation of Nurses



Andrea Riley, RN
President, Windham Federation of Professional Nurses



Heather Howlett, CA
President, WCMH United Employees

Healthcare
Higher Education
Public Employees
PSRP
Teachers

35 Marshall Road
Rocky Hill, CT 06067
860/257-9782
Fax: 860/257-8214
Toll Free: 888/398-3373
www.aftct.org

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