



# The Flame

Lighting the Way for Quality Health Care

September 25, 2009

*UNAP members bring an important perspective to the debate*

## Health care reform: there's no time to lose!



Linda McDonald, RN  
President

We are in the midst of a once-in-a-generation opportunity to enact significant positive health care reform.

UNAP members -- as health care workers, as union members, and as individuals who are concerned about having quality, affordable health coverage for ourselves and our families -- have a lot at stake in this debate.

It is important to cut through all the confusion and misinformation to identify what is really at stake. First, the most critical piece of reform is to control cost and ensure that everyone gets quality care by reforming the way the insurance companies do business. Reform must end the terrible practice of allowing insurers to exclude "pre-existing conditions;" it must require insurers to provide insurance to anyone who wants it; and it must put an end to price discrimination based on age, health history, or gender.

These insurance reforms are critical, but they may not be enough to change the behavior of health insurers -- especially those that dominate local markets. The only way to really improve insurance company behavior and control their costs is to by forcing them to compete against a public

insurance plan which will serve the public (rather than shareholders) and provide quality coverage at a lower cost.

Another key issue for reform is how to pay for it. Union members and other working Americans are already paying more than their fair share, and we oppose taxing workers' hard-earned health care benefits. The fairest way to pay for reform is through an income tax on the wealthiest Americans who benefitted from Bush tax cuts, or a tax on the insurance industry's huge profits.

It is very important that UNAP members make our voices heard in the coming weeks as our political

leaders make key decisions on reform. To get involved, contact the Health Care for America Now campaign at 401-463-5368 or by email at [healthcare@oceanstateaction.org](mailto:healthcare@oceanstateaction.org).

You should also consider writing a letter to your local paper expressing your views on reform, as well as calling your US Congressperson or Senator. Our representatives are under tremendous pressure from insurance companies, drug companies, and others who want to block or water down reform. They need to hear from their constituents to keep up the fight.

*With contributions from Peter Asen, Interim Director of Ocean State Action, a coalition of community organizations and unions (including UNAP) fighting together for social and economic justice.*

### **Some sickening facts about health care in the US**

**The US is the only industrialized country without a universal health insurance system.**

**The World Health Organization ranks the US health care system #37 in the world.**

**47 million Americans are uninsured. 2/3 of these are employed, and 9 million of these are children. (US Census)**

**Eighteen thousand people die each year because they are uninsured. (Institute of Medicine 2004)**

**About half of all personal bankruptcies are caused by medical bills. Most of these are people who have health insurance. (Health Affairs 2005)**

**The US spends twice as much on health care per capita (\$7,129) than any other country. (National Center for Health Statistics)**

**The US ranks 47th best in the world for life expectancy and 43rd best for infant mortality. (CIA Factbook-2008)**

**From 1999 to 2009, health care premium costs have increased by four times the rate of inflation. (Kaiser Family Foundation)**

**Medicare spends only 3¢ of every dollar on administrative costs; Private insurance companies spend 26¢ of every dollar on administrative costs. (JAMA 2007)**



**UNAP Local 5051 settles 2nd contract; wins election at HCRS in Vermont**

This past July, leaders of Local 5051 at HealthCare & Rehabilitation Services of Southeastern Vermont [HCRS] successfully negotiated their second contract. The new 2½ year agreement runs through December 31, 2011. As a result of hard bargaining, the Local prevented management from freezing wages and instituting deep cuts to employee medical insurance and retirement

benefits. For example, HCRS management proposed to freeze wages for 3 years, proposed that employees pay 20% of the cost of medical insurance premiums, and proposed to do away with the mandatory employer match to the 403(b) plan. Because of the Local, employees will receive 4% in wage increases between now and October

**Who is the UNAP?**

The UNAP represents over 5,000 nurses, therapists, technologists, support staff and others who work at:

- Copley Hospital (VT)
- Fatima Hospital
- Greater Rhode Island VNS
- Health Care & Rehabilitation Services of SE Vermont
- Homestead Group
- Kent Hospital
- Landmark Medical Center
- Memorial Hospital
- Putnam School District (CT)
- Rehabilitation Hospital of RI
- Retreat Healthcare (VT)
- Rhode Island Hospital
- RI Community Living & Support Services
- RI Dept of Human Services
- RI Veterans' Home
- URI, CCRI, RIC Health Services
- Westerly Hospital
- Youth Services (VT)
- Zambrano Hospital

of 2010, pay just 14½% of the cost of medical insurance premiums, and retain much of the mandatory employer match to the employee 403(b). The NLRB conducted a decertification election at HCRS on August 20, 2009. The union prevailed by taking 60% of the vote.

**Northern RI UNAP Local 5067 fights on at Landmark and RHRI**

Landmark Medical Center remains under the control of a Special Master, appointed by Superior Court Judge Michael Silverstein to 1) stabilize the hospital financially, 2) oversee the day-to-day operations of the hospital, and 3) find a strategic partner to purchase Landmark.

The Local continues to meet with the Special Master to discuss negotiating new contracts at Landmark and at the Rehabilitation Hospital of RI, which is also under the control of the Special Master. The Local also continues to advocate for preserving Landmark as a full-service community hospital.

**UNAP Local 5082 reaches new 3-year deal with Memorial Hospital of RI**

Local 5082 recently negotiated a new 3-year contract with Memorial Hospital. The contract will be in effect through early August of 2012. Remarkably, even with the recession and Memorial Hospital suffering from continued financial hardship, the Local succeeded in getting 7% in wage increases over the term of the agreement without making any concessions regarding medical insurance, retirement or other benefits. Modest language improvements were made on issues such as shift rotation and floating.

**UNAP Local 5050 at Youth Services in Vermont gears up for negotiations**

UNAP Local 5050, which represents members at Youth Services Inc., in Brattleboro,

Vermont, will be negotiating for a new contract this fall. The current agreement expires on September 30, 2009. Surveys have gone out to the membership and the Local is in the process of drafting proposals.

**Fatima freezes pension plan for non-union employees**

Fatima Hospital has decided to freeze the pension plan effective September 30, 2009 for all employees not covered under a collective bargaining agreement. Only **non-union members** are affected by this change since the union contract protects the pension rights of UNAP members.

Local 5110 leadership has worked diligently to assist in reorganizing the Hospital without loss of jobs for any of its members during these very tough times. It is a tribute to the collective bargaining process that the flexibility contained in the contract has helped the Hospital to survive and still protect members' wages and benefits.

**Brattleboro Retreat hires notorious union buster**

After years of positive and constructive labor relations, the administration of Retreat Healthcare has hired the nationally infamous anti-union law firm of Jackson Lewis to represent them in labor matters. The Union took note of the same firm's failed and disgraced union busting attempt at the UNAP local at HCRS last month (*see related article*). The Executive Board will

**Vermont UNAP members protest State budget cuts**



prepare for negotiations immediately even though the contract is not set to expire until next October. To be forewarned is to be forearmed.

### **Westerly Hospital locals prepare to bargain**

The contracts for both Westerly Hospital UNAP locals expire on November 5, 2009. Once again, both unions are coordinating their negotiation strategy and proposals. UNAP Local 5075 represents the professional and technical employees and UNAP Local 5104 represents the maintenance and service employees. Bargaining goals are focused on extending job protection for members on leave of absence, elimination of the hated no-fault attendance policy (discipline resulting from 6 occurrences in a year even if all absences are legitimate) and fair pay increases.

### **State RNs fight unpaid furlough days**

Common sense, labor law and a signed contract all support the idea that employees are entitled to work their regularly scheduled hours and receive their pay accordingly. But Governor Carcieri thinks he has the right to tell selected members to stay home without pay simply because he has mismanaged the state budget - again. The Union will honor the terms and conditions negotiated in the contract and expects the governor to do the same. Any furloughs imposed will be challenged.

### **Kent nurses ratify first contract**

Nurses at Kent Hospital ratified their first contract in July. The agreement was reached after a final around-the-clock negotiating session. The contract features a minimum increase of 8% over two years, the return of Blue Cross/Blue Shield, extended job protections for nurses on a leave of absence, protection of pension and medical insurance benefits and the many rights provided by a collective bargaining agreement.

### **VNS Local president testifies before congressional panel**

Michele Labossiere, long-time president of the union at the VNS of Greater Rhode Island, flew to Washington at the request of the Agency's CEO to provide

## **Stepping Up is stepping out!**

Over three years ago, the UNAP and RI Hospital joined forces with Women & Infants Hospital to create Stepping Up -- a career ladders program that provides training, education, career coaching, and support services for entry-level health care workers and low-income community residents.

With the help of Stepping Up, over 60 unemployed workers have found health care jobs, and over 100 hospital employees have returned to school to obtain a professional degree.



Stepping Up has begun to explore partnerships with other UNAP hospitals, including Landmark, Fatima, Westerly, and Memorial to provide health care jobs and educational opportunities across Rhode Island.



testimony before a congressional panel. The purpose of the testimony was to provide Congress with a nurse's perspective of proposed budget cuts to VNS patients. Labossiere met with Congressman Kennedy in the morning and then provided expert testimony before Congress in the afternoon.

### **It's That Time Again at the Homestead!**

UNAP Local 5068 at The Homestead Group is gearing up for contract negotiations. The contract expires December 31, and the bargaining team is not

wasting any time preparing.

The team met during the month of August to develop a contract survey and the local has sent the survey to the members.

Surveys will be collected and analyzed in order to determine the issues (to be developed into proposals) and goals identified by the membership.

The bargaining team hopes to be at the table with the employer soon.

### **RI Hospital UNAP faces new merger possibilities**

After waiting and wondering for more than two years to see what would happen with the proposed Lifespan-Care New England merger, UNAP members were shocked to hear that Lifespan now also has plans to merge RI Hospital and Miriam Hospital. While very little is known about what Lifespan has in mind for either merger, the UNAP is determined to make sure that the interests of employees, patients, and communities are protected as the process moves forward. The regulatory review of both mergers is likely to take many more months, and UNAP members will have the opportunity to weigh in at public hearings when the time comes.

### **UNAP awards annual scholarships**



*UNAP Director Rick Brooks presents \$1,000 scholarship check to Candi Baeta, a UNAP member employed by the Homestead Group. Other awardees were Caitlin McLoughlin, daughter of Fatima Hospital RN Barbara McLoughlin, and Monika Grist-Weiner, daughter of Brattleboro Retreat RN David Grist-Weiner.*

## UNAP Convention preview

On October 27, the UNAP will hold its sixth biannual convention. Close to 100 UNAP delegates and guests are expected to gather to consider proposed resolutions and constitutional amendments, hear reports from the UNAP and each affiliated local, and hear speeches by labor, community and political leaders, including RI gubernatorial candidates Attorney General Patrick Lynch and former Senator Lincoln Chafee.

Delegates will also elect UNAP officers, including President, Vice Presidents, Secretary, and Treasurer, to serve for the next two years.

The keynote speaker at the Convention will be Julie Pinkham, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Nurses Association (MNA), who will discuss the formation of National Nurses United, a new national union that is being formed by the California Nurses Association/NNOC, the MNA, and the United American Nurses. The NNU will be the largest nurses union in the country with over 150,000 members in 23 states.


### **It might not be too late to join us.**

If you would like to attend the UNAP Convention as a delegate or guest, check with your local president. The final deadline is Friday, October 7.

## Preparing for the H1N1 (Swine Flu) Virus

The UNAP is doing its part to raise awareness about how to recognize, prevent, and treat the H1N1 virus.

The RI Department of Health (HEALTH) and its many partners are preparing to embark on an aggressive, three-month H1N1 vaccination campaign. It is expected to begin in October and continue through December. As vaccine supply allows, the first priority for H1N1 vaccinations, as recommended by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), will be children and pregnant women, health care workers and household contacts/caregivers for infants younger than 6 months of age.



**Protect yourself  
and your patients**

**It is highly recommended that health care workers receive the H1N1 vaccination to avoid contracting or spreading the virus to their family members and patients.**

Every year, approximately 36,000 people in the country die from seasonal influenza and its complications. Seasonal flu typically affects people age 65 and older. This flu season, HEALTH anticipates that as many as 30% of the people in Rhode Island could get H1N1. Most people will experience mild illness; however, people with underlying medical conditions like heart and lung disease, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, diabetes or a weakened immune system can have more severe symptoms, be hospitalized or die.

### **How you can help**

HEALTH has requested licensed medical volunteers (e.g. nurses, doctors, pharmacists, EMTs) to assist with H1N1 vaccination efforts. Any licensed medical professional who is interested in volunteering can register at [www.riresponds.org](http://www.riresponds.org).

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