

Thousands of U.S. nurses go on strike, demanding better working conditions and higher wages

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Thousands of private sector nurses have gone off work in the US states of Minnesota and Wisconsin, demanding better working conditions and higher wages.

New York, September 12 (RHC)-- In what has been described as the largest private sector nurses' strike in U.S. history, some 15,000 workers in hospitals in the U.S. states of Minnesota and Wisconsin are on strike, affirming that hospital understaffing has harmed patient care and exhausted health workers.

The strike, which is planned to last three days, highlights nationwide health worker shortages that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Similar strikes have occurred regularly in the United States over the past year, with employees reporting to be exhausted by working during the COVID-19 pandemic and struggling with price rises.

The three-day work stoppage by nurses is set to last until Thursday morning, according to a spokesperson for the Minnesota Nurses Association, which coordinates the action. The nurses' union says it has been negotiating a new agreement for more than five months, and that nurses have been working without a contract for weeks.

"Hospital executives have already driven nurses away from the bedside by their refusal to solve the crises of staffing and retention in our hospitals," the union's negotiating team said in a statement, adding that nurses were "understaffed and overworked."

Holding signs bearing messages such as "Patients Before Profits," hospital employees gathered in groups in the early morning hours to protest outside some of the 16 affected hospitals. Those hospitals have planned to continue providing care, albeit with possible disruptions.

The strike has drawn support from U.S. lawmakers in Washington, including veteran Senator Bernie Sanders. "Nurses are the backbone of our health care system," Sanders wrote on Twitter, calling for fair scheduling and higher wages.

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), employment in healthcare across the United States is still below pre-pandemic levels. Some 37,000 fewer people work in healthcare now than in February 2020, a September 2 report from BLS said.

A group representing the hospitals says it has proposed wage increases of 10-12 percent over three years. The nurses are seeking raises in the range of 27-30 percent. The hospitals argue that "with the constant change in healthcare, all those who work in healthcare need to adapt to how we serve people."

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