



Professional Distinction

Personal Dignity

Patient Advocacy

November 17th, 2020

Governor Tim Walz
130 State Capitol
75 Rev Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Governor Walz,

On behalf of the 22,000 MNA nurses, we ask you to use your executive authority to protect nurses and patients. As you well know, we face another surge of Minnesotans with COVID-19 who are seeking hospitalization and facing drastic complications including death. However, this larger surge comes at a time when our hospital staff are already bending to meet capacity. It is inevitable that this will cause the system to break, which will put patients at risk and cost countless lives.

Nurses believe that this breakdown will be a direct result of the lack of protections and support provided to frontline healthcare workers. We know that we cannot contain this infection when we and our colleagues caring for patients are forced to work while infected. Employers across the state are calling healthcare workers back to work despite an exposure to a COVID patient. Conversely, nurses are being forced by their employers to use their personal time off to cover time spent safely quarantining after exposures at the bedside. These healthcare workers are running out of options as many no longer have personal leave left to use in order to quarantine responsibly.

At this same time, nurses are facing layoffs as Bethesda, St. Joseph’s, and portions of Children’s St. Paul hospital are irresponsibly closing beds, units and whole facilities in the middle of a pandemic. Bethesda’s dedicated COVID-unit beds are gone, shifted to St. Joseph’s. In December, St. Joseph’s will also be gone, which will shift patients to Regions, United, and who across our state. Hospital care doesn’t happen in a vacuum. Every change ripples outward to affect every patient in the state.

Hospital leaders are myopic as they assess the situation, viewing each decision with a business lens rather than one of patient care. They refuse to see the healthcare community as One Minnesota. As a result, we ask you, Governor Walz, to lead and intervene. Decisive action will ensure that nurses can continue to safely care for patients. In the absence of a larger strategy, nurses are asking that you take the following immediate steps.

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First, we ask that you close hospitals to visitors. This is a simple, critical step in curtailing the spread of the virus. Nurses must be able to focus on caring for patients. Right now, too much time is being spent reminding visitors to wear their masks or answering questions unrelated to patient care. Additionally, most rooms are not large enough to adequately social distance with more than two people inside. Removing visitors from hospitals will help to alleviate both staffing issues and reduce further spread of COVID.

Second, we ask that you ensure every nurse and health care worker receive rapid testing. Nurses are waiting days and, in some cases, up to a week to receive their COVID test results. This further contributes to nurses burning through their personal benefit time while awaiting results and keeps nurses away from the bedside at a time where they are needed most.

Third, we ask you that you require hospitals to create and share their plans regarding elective surgeries. In the absence of a statewide strategy, facilities are operating under different policies. As nurses, we understand that halting all elective procedures may leave patients without critical care. However, some hospitals continue to schedule high volumes of in-patient elective procedures at a time where cases are surging, and staffing is short. Hospitals need to be clear with the state and their employees about their plans for balancing the needs of patients.

Finally, we ask that you provide health care workers with emergency COVID leave. This would ensure that nurses and other frontline workers are able to safely quarantine without the stress of going without pay. No healthcare worker wants to stay home in a pandemic, but this ensures they will return to work sooner and with less risk to patients and other staff.

We appreciate the rough waters you are navigating as this pandemic has been politicized. We ask you to treat this disaster as any other flood or tornado and step in to protect Minnesotans. We are past the tipping point where individual measures will make the difference as this unwieldy virus spreads deeper throughout the state.

We need a statewide strategy to ensure every nurse and every patient are protected. For the safety of nurses and the health of Minnesotans, please act to protect and care for Minnesota patients.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary C. Turner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line above the "T" in "Turner".

Mary C. Turner, RN
President Minnesota Nurses Association and COVID unit nurse at North
Memorial Health



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