

Kaiser nurses in Fresno could strike to protest lack of Ebola training

By Barbara Anderson

Registered nurses at Kaiser Permanente Fresno and Kaiser hospitals elsewhere could walk out on a two-day strike next month to demand better Ebola protections and training, National Nurses United said Thursday.

The strike on Nov. 11 and 12 could include 18,000 nurses and nurse practitioners at 66 hospitals and clinics. In Fresno, Kaiser employs nearly 500 nurses at its hospital in northeast Fresno and at clinics in Fresno, Selma and Oakhurst.

"The main concerns are that Kaiser, for the last few years, has been cutting back on staffing and our patient protection," said Amy Arlund, a Kaiser Fresno critical-care nurse.

Arlund said Kaiser is not prepared for an Ebola patient.

"We don't have time to wait for the first patient to come to us; we're asking them to protect us before that time," she said.

But a Kaiser official said claims that Kaiser hospitals are not prepared for Ebola patients are false.

Nurses are "well aware of Kaiser Permanente's comprehensive and thorough training and preparation for Ebola," said Gay Westfall, senior vice president of human resources for Kaiser Foundation Hospitals and Health Plans. "Safety is our primary focus — for all of our nurses, doctors, employees and the public."

Kaiser recently decided to centralize the care and treatment of Ebola patients in two designated Kaiser Permanente medical centers, Westfall said in a written statement. "This will ensure we have expertly trained, ICU-level personnel who have received intensive training, and drilled multiple times, so they are ready to treat a patient with active disease, while keeping themselves and their colleagues, and other patients protected from infection."

NNU said nurses have been pressing Kaiser for weeks to provide the necessary training to protect nurses.

"Kaiser has shown a complete disregard for the safety of nurses and patients in the face of a disease that the World Health Organization calls the 'most severe acute health emergency in modern times,'" Deborah Burger, co-president of NNU and a Kaiser nurse, said in a statement. "We will not be silent while Kaiser puts all of us, our families and our communities at risk."

A strike will also occur at Providence Hospital in Washington, D.C., affecting 400 RNs, the NNU said. And strikes also could occur in Boston, Chicago, Houston, Las Vegas and other cities.

Arlund said nurses are asking for optimal personal protective equipment, including full-body hazmat suits that leave no skin exposed and are impermeable to blood and virus. And the hospital should provide proper training on how to put on gear and remove it, she said.

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