

“Enough is enough!” Statements of sympathy pour in from nurses in response to suicide of a California nurse

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Are you a nurse? We want to hear from you: Tell us about the conditions at your hospital and what you think about this tragedy. Comments will be published anonymously.

Tragedy struck this past week when a nurse at Kaiser's Santa Clara Medical Center died by suicide in the middle of his shift. The struggling nurse, who has yet to be named, shot and killed himself in a supply room in the emergency department where he worked.

The suicide occurred as 5,000 nurses at Stanford Health Care and Lucile Packard Children's Hospital were on strike to demand better working conditions, including mental health services. Four months ago, Stanford travel nurse Michael Odell committed suicide in the middle of his shift.

The *World Socialist Web Site* has received an outpouring of messages from nurses in response to this tragedy. Together, they paint a picture of the impossible conditions nurses and healthcare workers face on a daily basis.

Travel nurse Ruth told the WSWs, “I have seen entirely too many stories like this. Many nurses including myself want to leave this profession. I am a traveling nurse and I have worked at two facilities where there have been suicides.

“It isn't just hospitals that are to blame. I work for a travel agency that has consistently been unfair with wages, paying significantly less. They started a new policy where you are penalized for requesting a day off during your contract. Even if you work your required hours, they will dock your housing stipends if you request a day off during your contract.

“My mother passed away during my current assignment. I never so much as got a sympathy card, just a reminder that we do not get bereavement leave. A

traveler that committed suicide after leaving his shift was employed by my agency and even had the same recruiter. They never even reached out to ask how we were doing. I have also been a victim of nurse bullying. I've had many dark days because of it and I suffer from depression. It was reported to management, but they didn't care. It inevitably resulted in loss of employment after the bullies set me up to fail.

“A nurse at another facility I was at committed suicide after being called in to the management office because nurses complained that he asked for help too much. This happened during the peak of COVID. They didn't have enough nurses. The ratio at the time was one nurse to eight patients in an ER. A normal ratio is one to four. The nurse also had a physical disability. It was a birth defect.

“Every story is unique, but the feels are all the same. Every day, nurses walk into hospitals where they are emotionally and sometimes physically abused by patients and family members. They are expected to be nice regardless and get into trouble for offending the abusers. They may lose their job if someone complains. I have seen and experienced threats and verbal and physical abuse. A hospital employee suffered a brain bleed due to a violent patient at a hospital I was working at.

“Hospitals will work you to death and overwhelm you with patients and expect you to hurry all the time to meet their metrics. If you make a mistake, they will let you sink. I have been interrupted as many as eight times in a 10 minute period while trying to care for a patient. People wonder why nurses make mistakes. I want to leave this profession, where you are expected to care for everyone else and NO ONE cares for you. Enough is enough.”

Nursing assistant Jasmine commented that “I fear this won't be the only tragedy that happens in the health care field. We are all burned out. I'm a nursing assistant, and I

can tell you that for past few years I have been in nursing, I have never been under so much pressure and stress. My job offers mental health services, but I feel burn-out isn't being taken as seriously when you are piled with more work to do every day to add to the stress. I have seen good nurses be driven away because of their mental health. They can't take the pressure any more.

"I heard someone in the higher-ups once say 'No one calls off because they are burned out.' We all know that is a complete lie. I'm angry we are not being heard enough. I say enough is enough. It should be enough when the patients you care for every day see a change in you as well, and it should also be enough when a nurse takes their own life to escape the pain."

Samantha, an emergency room nurse in New York, wrote, "In New York we have no patient ratio. I work in an ER in Binghamton where we are constantly holding patients and taking six to eight critically ill patients on average. We are also expected to increase 'door to doctor' time by finding new places to move people to in the computer, to look good on paper for the hospital.

"We are seeing, on average, holding 20 in a 30-bed emergency department, and we are seeing 100-130 daily. Literally treating people on cots in a lecture hall has become the norm nowadays. Last shift I worked, I was harassed by a supervisor who attacked me verbally, and nothing has been done. This is a normal daily occurrence.

"We have lost most staff and are 90 percent travelers. They have also cut our wages for any extra time that we pick up, but continue to purge money at temp staff paying triple the amount I make. The hospital also cannot figure out why they are losing staff. Zero retention bonuses have been offered, but new staff can get a sign on bonus of 10k with no commitment. This is just the surface of what's wrong in health care."

Nurse Amanda wrote, "Hospitals nationwide are struggling for nurses. Nurses are leaving bedside in droves. Between the way the hospital system and patients and family members treat us, it's not a sustainable way to maintain a career. Management begs for you to come in and work overtime hours 50, 60 and sometimes 70 hours a week. Sometimes we are physically assaulted by patients, but we are told by management we are not allowed to press charges or defend ourselves or else we lose our job.

"Critical patients come in, and in an attempt to initiate life-saving care, we get yelled at by other patients who are on the call light requesting blankets. Once your critical patient dies and you go in to address the patient needing blankets, you have to act as if that other patient didn't just

die and nothing happened while responding to the patient asking for blankets.

"Executive hospital staff seem to think that pizza parties are an appropriate way to compensate staff who are now suffering from depression because of COVID. I'm writing this after coming off of a 12-hour shift, in which I received one 30-minute break. I didn't get to eat anything during that 30 minutes because I spent it charting. I consumed a total of 16 ounces of water from the time I started my shift until it ended because I didn't have time to eat or drink anything throughout my shift.

"Patients come into the hospital expecting to be waited on hand and foot, receiving blankets, food and water immediately as soon as they make the request. Often times in the emergency room, that's not possible. We have to prioritize care. Most patients cannot eat or drink due to waiting on test results and people get mad and yell. I can't remember a shift that I've worked in my last three years as a nurse that I didn't either experience myself or witness physical or verbal abuse from patients or family members.

"I'm afraid for the medical system because with the way things are now it's not sustainable, and if nothing is done, nurses are going to continue to leave and there will be nobody in the hospitals left to care for these patients. You have professional athletes out there making millions of dollars for playing a game, but you have nurses who save lives every day making \$30 an hour with current inflation. Many of us are living paycheck to paycheck unless we pick up 80 hours a week.

"Nurses are held liable for any errors or mistakes they make on the job and even now have the possibility of serving life in prison for making a mistake. There are jobs available that offer \$15-an-hour minimum wage where you don't have to fear serving time for making a mistake. The government and the general public need to take this current crisis throughout the nation's health care system seriously otherwise it's going to continue to crumble."



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