

“We’ve all suffered the same way”: Striking Cedars-Sinai Medical Center workers speak out

Our reporters
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On Monday, 2,000 health care workers at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles began a planned 5-day strike. The striking healthcare service workers—including certified nursing assistants, surgical technicians, sterile processing technicians, transporters, environmental service workers, plant operation workers, and food technician workers—are fighting for safe working conditions, improved staffing and better wages.

The hospital, located in the expensive West Hollywood District of Los Angeles, pays most of its service workers around \$17 an hour, despite a record \$1 billion in profits last year. Workers have also raised safety concerns related to understaffing and burnout. The hospital was issued seven citations by California’s CAL/OSHA agency in April and received a ‘D’ grade from the healthcare safety watchdog Leapfrog.

Reporters with the *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to striking workers on the picket line.

“The list of things we need to do is growing, but we’ve been short-staffed for so long, and it wears on you,” said **Felicia**, a certified nursing assistant (CNA) with nine years’ experience at the hospital. “I like to spend time with my patients, get to know them, provide the best care I can. But when we’re short-staffed we can’t do that, we’re stressed out, running from patient to patient.”

“I work with seniors, where things like hip fractures can be common. I can’t rush them, I can’t handle them in just three minutes, I have to take 20 minutes to make sure they’re safe. But then management will ask you about not completing something. It’s a lot.”

Despite putting in 60-72 hours a week, it was

impossible for her to buy a home in the area near her work, leading her to move to a less desirable neighborhood. “Cedars is well-established, my family would like to be also. Someone working at this fine hospital should not be struggling paycheck to paycheck.”

She also spoke in support of RaDonda Vaught, the Tennessee nurse who will be criminally sentenced this Friday for making a medical error. Vanderbilt University Medical Center “threw her under the bus. And this is the type of company that we’re giving our lives for! We’re working overtime, we’re picking up extra days, and as soon as something happens, they drop you. ...That could have been any one of my nurses that I work with. It’s easy to look at her and wag your finger, but those same conditions are happening in hospitals around the world.

She also responded positively to the suggestion of unifying the struggles of nurses who are all facing the same working conditions. “I think that’s what we have to do. I know a couple RNs from here and Kaiser who aren’t crossing the picket lines. Let’s all stick together even though it’s hard. There’s safety in numbers. Don’t be intimidated by management.”

Mauricio, another CNA, noted the overwhelming levels of stress and overwork that health care workers struggle with. “Some people give up and change professions, but it doesn’t fix anything because it’s bad everywhere. It keeps going and going. Nurses are looking into going to something else because they’re tired of being tired. We come to work every single day, and the more we work the more they want from us. We come in six days straight? They want seven, eight. It’s

never enough for them.”

“Cedars is penny-pinching us,” said another health care worker who wished to remain anonymous. “The workload here is just too much for one person. When the volume is too much, the safety of the employee and the patient are at risk. That’s why I’m out here.”

“For me it’s all a matter of safety. If someone is taking care of 12 patients, then I don’t want to be their patient. Workloads are so high that we can’t give quality care to our patients. There’s no time to get to know patients, to talk to them, to treat them like a human being. There’s only time to administer the necessary care, and then it’s right off to the next one. Patients are treated like sardines.”

“With inflation, everything is going up. The price of gas is going up, food prices are going up and what they’re offering us—\$17/hour or whatever it is—it’s just not sufficient today. There are other places that will pay \$20.”

The worker noted that healthcare workers on strike at other hospitals were facing the same conditions and supported expanding the strike across the state. “I know at Stanford [Health Care] it was the same thing as it is here. They made billions and didn’t give any to their workers.”

Steve, a distribution worker, discussed how workers are overworked to make up for the short staffing. “Overtime is double hours. Sometimes people work two or three doubles a week. There’s no recognition. [Cedars-Sinai] made a billion dollars in profit last year and now they pay people to do our jobs three times what we’re making now.”

“The biggest issue for us is patient safety. Due to lack of staff, burnout, things of that nature, we can’t provide adequate patient care.”

“It’s all the same everywhere. We’ve all suffered the same way. These conglomerates have all the money and they won’t address any of these problems.”



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