

US nurses form rank-and-file committee to defend scapegoated healthcare workers

WSWS Health Care Workers Newsletter
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On Sunday, May 22, at a meeting hosted by the World Socialist Web Site Health Care Workers Newsletter, nurses from throughout the US met to discuss the situation facing healthcare workers and the scapegoating of nurses for the consequences of short staffing and overwork.

The meeting took place one week after former Tennessee nurse RaDonda Vaught was sentenced to three years probation for the medical error that led to the death of Charlene Murphey in 2017. The reports and remarks by nurses at the meeting emphasized that though Vaught was not given any prison time, her prosecution and conviction have set a dangerous precedent for the criminalization of medical errors.

Other nurses and healthcare workers are facing victimization, including Michelle Heughins, a nurse in North Carolina who faces charges for the 2019 prison death of John Neville.

Nurses at the meeting adopted the following resolution, founding a national healthcare workers steering committee to assist in the building of rank-and-file committees at every hospital and workplace to defend nurses and healthcare workers, and to connect opposition to victimization to a struggle to advance the interests of nurses and patients against the for-profit healthcare system.

To get involved in the organization of healthcare workers rank-and-file committees, fill out the form at the bottom of this page.

This meeting resolves to found a Steering Committee to oversee the building of a network of rank-and-file healthcare workers' committees. These worker-controlled committees will be composed of, by and for nurses and healthcare workers themselves. We are calling for them to be built in every hospital and

healthcare facility. These committees will:

1. Oppose the scapegoating of healthcare workers for systemic issues that result from short-staffing and overwork that put nurses and healthcare workers in impossible positions.

Research has shown that the odds of patient mortality increase by 7 percent for every additional patient in the average nurse's workload. This cruel statistic—which the healthcare systems are well aware of—has not stopped the hospitals from enforcing lean staffing models and pushing impossible workloads on nurses.

Yet RaDonda Vaught, Michelle Heughins and many other nurses are being set up to take the fall. The committees will place as a central focus the mobilization of rank-and-file nurses to defend these nurses and take this struggle forward.

We will not allow a nurse or healthcare worker *anywhere* to be scapegoated for the issues which are outside of our control and that are caused by the continued prioritization of private profit over patient safety.

2. Connect opposition to victimization to a counter-offensive of nurses and healthcare workers to fight for safe staffing ratios, wage increases, mental health services, a massive infusion of funds into the healthcare system and an end to the subordination of healthcare to private profit.

Our profession is under attack. A larger fight must be waged to save the profession. Every day more of our coworkers leave the bedside. Burnout, PTSD and mental health struggles are part of the everyday life of nurses everywhere. Our most noble profession has been gutted and turned into a nightmare. This can and must be halted.

A great crime is being carried out, not just against nurses but against all of society. Everyone will need a hospital bed at some point or another. Who will care for our loved ones, neighbors or the next generation when conditions are made so unbearable that no one enters this profession?

We further state that the committees must be independent of the existing trade unions, which are politically aligned with the Democratic Party and work with the healthcare giants and management.

The unions took no measure to protect the lives of nurses during the pandemic. They are not waging a campaign against victimization, have stood by as the conditions of nurses have steadily deteriorated and have isolated and suppressed strikes.

The committees will strive to unite all nurses, whether or not they are in unions. They will connect the struggle of nurses with the struggles of other sections of the working class, in the US and throughout the world, as part of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



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