

“We are on the path toward an explosion”: Striking Genesys nurses in Michigan speak out against healthcare cuts, Trump dictatorship

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10 September 2025

Are you a nurse at Genesys or another hospital system? Tell us what your conditions are like and what you're fighting against by filling out the form below. All submissions will remain anonymous.

Nurses and case workers at Henry Ford Genesys Hospital in Grand Blanc, Michigan, entered the 10th day of their strike on Wednesday for safe staffing ratios, higher wages and against the union-busting tactics of hospital management.

The more than 700 hospital employees, members of Teamsters Local 332, walked out on September 1 after Henry Ford Health Genesys refused to accept their demands.

Nurse-to-patient ratios are the primary issue for nurses. One said that nurses are often too busy to even bathe their patients. Floors and units are not properly stocked with essentials such as medicine and food, causing nurses and nurses' aides to have to go to different units or floors to obtain them, further sacrificing time and patient care.

Nurses also said the refusal of the hospital to adequately recruit and retain nurses has been a problem since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This has caused a great number of nurses to leave, and has only worsened.

“I'll have a patient who just had a myocardial infarction who needs to be monitored, then I am hanging chemo, then I have a neutropenic patient and another patient who is climbing out of bed,” Janet told the WSW. “Then across the hall I'll have an old man who is dying and there's no one there to hold his hand. What am I supposed to do?”

Strike at the crossroads

The strike stands at the crossroads, with scab nurses being brought in and other critical unionized hospital staff crossing the picket lines each day.

The scab nurses are being paid \$8,000 per week and provided with food stipends. Management even opened the cafeteria on

third shift, something which it had not done for some time.

The scabs were given a single day's orientation and did not know where supplies or equipment were located, which is highly dangerous to patients and undermines patient care.

Nurses also report that other hospital employees, including support staff, which is represented by AFSCME Local 3518, are also crossing the picket line. According to information published on the Henry Ford Health website, AFSCME Local 3518 officials settled a contract with the hospital on August 22, on the eve of the strike by the nurses and case workers. This is a betrayal that isolates the strike.

When asked why the Teamsters bureaucracy permitted the scabs to cross the picket line, the strikers said union officials told them that AFSCME workers had no choice because joining the strike would be “illegal.” One nurse said the AFSCME contract did not permit strikes until the contract had expired.

Management is ratcheting pressure up on nurses in other ways. It also brought security from its Detroit hospital to help with the enforcement of the strikebreaking operation. Meanwhile, striking nurses reported that their cars have been vandalized and hospital security did nothing about it.

Hospital management also terminated their insurance coverage, including life, dental, vision and short-term disability. Henry Ford Health even terminated policies that the nurses pay for themselves.

The only way the nurses and case workers at Henry Ford Health Genesys can carry forward the struggle is by organizing a rank-and-file committee that is democratically constituted and led by the most trusted workers, who will take the conduct of the strike and the negotiations out of the hands of the union bureaucrats.

In this way, rank-and-file nurses and case workers can make a direct appeal to the rest of the hospital staff to join the picket lines, stop the scabbing and shut down the hospital. This fight must also include an appeal to auto workers and other sections of the working class in the Grand Blanc area to join the fight for safe staffing levels, good wages and benefits at the hospital, which is a critical health care resource for the public in the area.

“They don’t want us fully staffed because that costs money”

Hazel, a nurse, said: “We have had patients who have to return to surgery because they haven’t gotten the post-operative care that they need, and they end up with bad complications.”

She also discussed the worsening conditions across the whole hospital. “The ER floods on a regular basis. I’ve worked shifts there where I’m walking through an inch of water.”

Overtime was also cited by nurses as being a major issue, with mandatory 12- or 16-hour shifts being common. Nurses are only able to refuse overtime twice per year. Overtime pay, previously calculated to begin whenever anyone went over their scheduled hours each shift, now starts only when a nurse has reached 40 hours for the week.

Other issues cited by nurses were the hospital’s use of COVID funds for minimal upgrades, such as repaving the parking lot and new furniture, when issues such as water leaks went unfixed and created a risk of other pathogens.

They said health care coverage will be offered, but the terms of the new policies will not be disclosed until after the contract vote. The strikers are angry that they would potentially be expected to vote on a contract containing health care insurance terms they will not know anything about until months later.

Holidays are also being cut; one nurse stated that Easter, New Years’ Eve, and Christmas Eve were being cut by the hospital.

Julie, a nurse for more than three decades, explained: “It all started when Ascension bought the hospital and made it a corporate entity. Since then, the whole entire hospital has been dragged into the ground. The companies, like Ascension, like Henry Ford, they make billions. And we have short-staffing because they are not posting positions, they don’t want us fully staffed because that costs money.”

Hannah, a new nurse, added: “I don’t feel respected. I don’t feel valued. I come here and I’m just a body. I did not pay thousands of dollars and most of my adult life to go to school just to be used as an object.

“My unit is one of the biggest in the hospital, and we have two nurse aides for over 45 patients. We will have just one nurse to a hallway. That’s an insane amount of risk we are taking for our licenses and for our patients. It’s not functional.

“The healthcare system is completely broken. I think to fix it we need a functional government. Neither party so far has been functional. I don’t really see the difference between the two.”

with more patients. We are already drowning in what we have now.”

Julie said, “I don’t think just the cuts alone will cause problems. It will be the corporate greed. When money gets tight from the cuts, they won’t cut the CEO salaries. Administrators are making millions upon millions upon millions, even the middle management managers are getting year-end bonuses for keeping the expense of their department down, and they do that by sending nurses home early, by not posting staffing positions, not staffing the unit. They’ll just do that more when the cuts set in.”

She added, “I don’t know if the political party even makes a difference. We’ve got Democrats in office right now and they’ve been in office for a while, and they’re not doing anything. I don’t know that any political party is strong enough.”

Other nurses spoke on the attack on public health and RFK’s drive to take over national scientific institutes. Hazel said, “I’ve lost faith in our government. I think a lot of people had. People also have no faith in public health, or they just don’t even believe anything they are told anymore. If there’s another pandemic, I think the public wouldn’t know who to trust.

“We act like COVID is over, but then we also never went back to our pre-COVID infectious disease standards. The things RFK is trying to do is getting rid of decades and decades of progress in public health. We aren’t a third-world country, but our public health system is like a third-world country. We are backsliding.”

She continued, “I’m worried we are repeating conditions right before World War Two. We are on the path toward an explosion. I’m definitely scared of another world war. How do we stop it? I don’t know.”

Hannah said, “Everything is happening quickly. People are disappearing off the streets and Trump is just demolishing entire programs like the Department of Education. Now there’s even the Department of War. It’s a whole bunch of nonsense. I don’t know what we can do. I think the only thing we can do is start fighting from the community level and go up.”



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“Our public health system is like a third-world country”

Workers turned to the broader political situation.

Regarding the cuts to Medicaid in Trump’s “Big Beautiful Bill,” Marjorie said, “First, I’m worried that our charting is going to get more intense. We already have to chart so much that just helps make sure the hospital gets reimbursed. But also, Medicaid cuts are going to close hospitals, and then we are going to be flooded