



Hospital cuts petitioned

By Andrew Oxford

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The union representing employees of Holy Cross Hospital has launched a petition opposing cuts to nursing and other direct care positions amid uncertainty about staffing levels and the future of some services at the facility.

More than 300 local residents have signed the petition which will be presented to administrators at the hospital's next board meeting, according to the state chapter of the National Union of Nurses and Health Care Employees.

"It is our understanding that Holy Cross Hospital will eliminate or reduce the number of experienced nursing assistants and other support staff at the hospital. And there is also a possibility that the hospital doctor in the evening will soon be 'on-call' and not at the hospital," District 1199 New Mexico president Fonda Osborn wrote in an Aug. 14 statement.

The campaign preceded an announcement by the hospital Monday (Aug. 19) that contract security personnel would no longer be on site during the daytime on weekdays.

"Maybe that is why the hospital had employees train how to 'take down' or 'disarm' someone acting out — nurses, nursing assistants, technicians, housekeepers should not have to worry about security in a hospital," Fonda wrote.

Administrators said the change was "not anything dramatic."

"It is just part of the ongoing process of us looking at our expenses," CEO Peter Hofstetter told *The Taos News*.

He added that no plans to eliminate direct care positions had been finalized but staffing adjustments were being considered alongside other measures in an effort to reduce costs amid changes in the health-care sector.

Like hospitals around the country, he said Holy Cross was grappling with revenue uncertainties when changes to Medicare and other insurance programs are implemented Oct. 1.

"We have tried to be honest with folks and lay out where things are," Hofstetter said. With changes to Medicare reimbursement rates and other ramifications of the Affordable Care Act unclear, he said plans to adapt were "sort of in suspended animation."

Acknowledging the precarious circumstances facing the healthcare sector, the union called on leaders at Holy Cross to engage in an open discourse about any changes under consideration.

“If these proposed changes are driven by extraordinary financial concerns of the administration then they need to have an honest discussion, a transparent discussion about these matters,” Fonda wrote. “And these discussions need to be with the professional care givers and their potential patients — the community the hospital is here to serve.”

Union members proposed developing a committee of nurses, technicians, assistants and other staff as well as administrators to discuss staffing decisions.

Hospital officials after out to union leaders following the petition’s launch and met with staff representatives Tuesday (Aug. 20) though no decisions were reached on staffing discussions.