

Wealth is Our Cause

A Kaiser nurse in Fresno died in late May of COVID-19, and nurses are putting the blame on Kaiser for its lack of PPE. In fact, out of more than 2,500 complaints received by Cal OSHA from February to May, nearly 120 were about Kaiser, the most among any company in the state.

As one example, when one facility ran out of replacement shields for its air-purifying respirators, they resorted to using electrical tape and plastic. And workers at various facilities say Kaiser is still cutting corners, essential supplies aren't always available, and lack of proper instruction means it's up to each worker to protect themselves if exposed.

And the icing on the cake? Throughout all this, Kaiser still managed to make a net profit of \$3.4 billion during the first half of this year.

Mental Gymnastics

Kaiser workers are helping to push SB 855, which requires insurers to cover any mental health treatment that their doctor prescribes, not just emergency services. Nobody should have to wait to get into a crisis before receiving the care they need.

It's no wonder Kaiser workers are passionate about mental healthcare access. Ask anyone in the hospital and they'll tell you it was hard enough before the pandemic, now stress and anxiety have been taken to a whole new level.

Of course, the fight doesn't end if SB 855 passes the senate, since it only applies to patients with insurance. This should only be the beginning of the fight to expand mental healthcare access, with the only logical conclusion being full access to everyone, whether they have insurance or not.

Passing the Buck

Even after almost six months of the pandemic, Kaiser still doesn't have enough tests. The only people being tested are the ones showing symptoms, even though it is already well known that you don't need to be showing symptoms to be infected and possibly spreading the virus.

For those people who cannot get tests through Kaiser, it means they have to look for resources in the community. The consequence – public clinics are overloaded and the delay for testing can be longer than 10 days.

Instead of donating a \$63 million charitable grant for contact tracing, how about Kaiser starts by testing their own patients?

The Evidence Is in: Ratios Now at Risk

For the good of science and society, doctors and nurses engage in evidence-based practices. In 2004, evidence-based research of nurse-to-patient ratios became a part of the California Labor Law. Ratios ensure community health and safety. In the guise of the COVID-19 pandemic, on the 3rd of July, the CA Dept. of Public Health issued an AFL, All Facilities Letter, "allowing" hospitals to apply for a waiver to raise ratios. For instance, a hospital acuity level which mandates a 4 patients-per-nurse ratio could be raised to between 5 to 7 patients-per-nurse.

During a pandemic, given the struggle to keep ourselves and our patients protected, increasing ratios is like throwing gasoline on a fire. Fewer patients will get the care they need, every patient will wait longer, even in a crisis, and PPE being hastily taken on and off by every nurse will greatly increase risk of staff and/or patient infection.

As an alternative to raising nurse ratios, California hospitals can start hiring new grads. Nationally, from January to June of 2020, nearly 85,000 BSN and ASN nurses got their licenses. All new grad nurses face a hiring gap before reaching the hospital workplace due to traditional experience requirements. The same year, 2004, as ratios were passed, there was a nursing shortage in California. New grads were hired with generous bonuses and extensive job training.

In these days of battling a virus, the front line should not be spread thin, rather more troops are needed. Increasing staffing cuts risk and ensures greater health benefit as evidence proves.

