Before digging into the news on negotiations, the bargaining team would like to highlight the great food and service that the Heartwood Dietary members have been providing. In order to stay focused on our work, we have been ordering lunch every day from the Heartwood kitchen and we have had a great experience and want to say thank you to the hard-working members who make that happen!

Our 4th bargaining session was on Monday, September 30. We spent 10 hours in negotiations, with several hours of waiting again in the morning for the employer proposals. By lunch time, we were finally able to sign off on the Tentative Agreements from Day 2, with one exception. CRMC’s attorney wanted to revisit the draft language on extra hours and promised us (again) that we would get a draft soon. The management team also provided us with a draft proposal on Leaves of Absence and on changes to the Grievance Process (both are available on our website). The LOA proposal was okay, but it did not address how disability or pregnancy leaves would work for employees not eligible for FMLA, which many are not. Their Grievance Process proposal did nothing to address our concerns and was more a step backward than forward. They also offered a full economic proposal for the first time.

The proposal included improvements to Funeral Leave, Holiday Pay and some market adjustments. They then offered two “options” for moving forward. One option would include wage increases of 1% in year one, and 1.5% in years two and three. The second option would offer wage increases of .5% in year one, and 1% in years two and three, but would offer a few other economic items, like increases to shift differential and the uniform allowance. The proposal was given verbally, not in writing, so a copy of our notes on the proposal are available on the website.

In the afternoon, the union team offered a comprehensive counter proposal on the outstanding economic and non-economic items (with the exception of the grievance language). The team is sticking to the priorities set out in our member surveys, with our top three items being: better wages, health insurance and pension. And we intend to make progress on all three! We did not fall for the employer’s proposal that we choose from their options. We know the members at CRMC deserve both a fair wage increase and improvements to benefit provisions where we are behind.

We spent more than an hour walking through comparisons of the
employer health insurance plan and how the union-sponsored plans would offer better coverage at a lower cost, with a broader access network than the current Traditional Plan. We also continued to express support for the H.S.A. plan, but want to provide lower premiums and provide guarantees on the H.S.A contributions. This was followed by a review of retirement plan comparisons between the CRMC 401-K plan that delays employer contributions to our accounts for more than a year with the union pension plan. In almost all cases members would be better off under the union proposal, while costing the employer the same or less money. We concluded with a presentation on how CRMC compares on wages by comparing our wages with St. Joseph’s Medical Center and other union hospitals in rural settings, from Owatonna to Grand Marais. In most cases the data shows that CRMC members deserve a raise!

As the day ended, we felt that we should have made more progress on economics and are still frustrated at the slow pace in movement from the management team. We will be back in bargaining for our final scheduled session on Wednesday, October 2 and will report back more soon.

CONTRACT EXPIRED AT MIDNIGHT
At the end of the day, the bargaining team unanimously voted to allow our contract to expire at midnight, rather than make a proposal to extend the contract. This does not mean that management can suddenly change the terms of our employment without our agreement or vote. In fact, if they did so, it would be an Unfair Labor Practice under the National Labor Relations Act and we could sue them. In fact, when the contract expires, only two things change right away. First, we gain the right to strike for the first time! This will be the first time our contract expires as a “non-profit” health care institution. As public sector workers, we were considered “essential employees” under the law and did not have this right. As of today, we will have the right to strike, but we can only do so if a super-majority of members vote to do so AND we would have to provide a 10-day written notice. Second, Management does not have to arbitrate any grievances filed during the contract expiration period. We can still file grievances, but they will then become issues management has to deal with in bargaining, and there is no guarantee we will get to arbitrate them if we can’t reach agreement. At this point we believe this is a risk worth taking.

VOTING ON THE CONTRACT
Whatever we get from management as their final proposal on Wednesday, October 2, we will bring back to the full membership for review and a vote. Members will have the right to accept or reject the offer. While we hope we will be able to bring back a great contract proposal we can all celebrate, the decision to accept or reject the offer will be one for the whole group to decide. We will make sure copies are available on the website and in paper copy at CRMC at least three days before the vote.

TENTATIVE VOTING DETAILS
We plan to offer two full days for members to vote on the final offer we get next week on Wednesday, October 2. Here are the details:

**Tuesday, October 8:**
- Cornerstone Lounge: 6:00am – 6:00pm
- Breezy Point Clinic Breakroom: 7:30am – 9:00am

**Thursday, October 10:**
- Heartwood/Hallett Breakrooms: 6:00am – 9:00am
- Cornerstone Lounge: 9:00am – 11:00am
- Business Office Breakroom: 11:00am – 1:00pm
- Baxter Clinic Breakroom: 11:00am – 1:00pm
- Heartwood/Hallett Breakrooms: 1:30pm – 3:00pm
- Cornerstone Lounge: 3:00pm – 6:00pm

Ballots will be counted at 6pm.

Keep wearing your buttons and supporting our team and our proposals. We are making progress, but we have a long way to go.

In Solidarity,
The Union Bargaining Team