

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Lake View Hospital's Response to The Open Letter to the Community

Lake View carefully reviewed the Open Letter to the Community from "The nurses of Lake View Hospital in Two Harbors" that was published in the North Shore Journal on July 15, 2022. While it is not entirely clear which nurses at Lake View were even aware of the letter before it was published, we do know that it does not include our RNs who work in the medical clinic, population health program, RNs in clinical IT, foot care, and/or our community wellness program. The letter also does not represent all of the other nurses/clinical staff who work at Lake View, including LPNs, nursing assistants, or clinical assistants.

The nature of the letter causes us to believe it is the position of the Minnesota Nurses Association (MNA), which represents 20 staff nurses employed by Lake View. It is unclear to us why the MNA would not be open about its position. The current collective bargaining agreement between Lake View and the MNA is set to expire on September 30, 2022. Essentia Health and St. Luke's Hospital in Duluth are currently in negotiations with the MNA and the staff nurses they represent. More specific information on the contract negotiations between St. Luke's and the MNA can be found at www.yourcaredestination.com.

Lake View will address the statements presented in the Open Letter to the Community. They are as follows:

Lake View does not have a nurse staffing crisis, and we are not operating with a skeleton crew of nurses as the letter asserts. In a collaborative effort earlier this year between our nursing leadership and staff nurses, we jointly agreed to post an additional nurse shift for days and evenings during the busy summer months to minimize potential call outs for the scheduled on call nurse and/or additional nursing staff. Lake View's nurse staffing of the inpatient unit and emergency department, in partnership with our staff nurses, has never compromised the safety of our patients in either area. We are proud to deliver high-quality and safe patient care before and throughout the current pandemic.

Lake View's staff nurses have worked hard over the past two plus years, along with every other health care team member at Lake View. We experienced increased patient volumes in many areas, unique challenges with COVID-19 testing, vaccination, and treatment. Our health care system provided all employees with a monetary appreciation bonus in December of 2021, we maintained regular staff nurse FTE/schedules and full wages during the state shutdown, offered sick time benefits to support COVID-19 isolation and quarantine, and provided many other employee appreciation benefits over the past two plus years. Lake View has also encouraged our staff nurses to apply for the Minnesota Frontline Worker Pay being offered by the state.

The staff nurse group at Lake View recently declined an incentive bonus program offered by Lake View to support the agreed upon staffing model for this summer. The incentive bonus requested by the staff nurses/MNA is not equitable or fair to our hard-working employees across our entire organization. Their bonus request alone (not factoring in their regular hourly rates of pay, overtime rates, shift differentials, and/or other bonuses outlined in the current collective bargaining agreement) would be more than the regular hourly rate of pay for 67% of all other Lake View staff across our organization.

Lake View has been very fortunate to maintain our team of staff nurses throughout the pandemic, and we have not lost veteran nurses. In fact, Lake View had only three scheduled staff nurse departures since the beginning of the pandemic. One former hospital staff nurse now works in our medical clinic, one staff nurse retired after a 40+ year career at Lake View, and one new staff nurse resigned during her orientation period for personal family reasons.

We hired six additional staff nurses to this bargaining unit since the start of the pandemic, coming from hospitals like St. Luke's and Essentia Health in Duluth and elsewhere. Our local experience of nurse retention and recruitment has been significantly more favorable than many other hospitals in our region and across the state.

Lake View continues to recruit additional staff nurses to support our hospital, ED, and ambulatory teams as we continue to grow. We recently hired one additional full-time staff nurse, and we have two additional part-time staff nurse positions posted. We are recruiting to support the planned future expansion of our infusion therapy services, future expansion of surgery and procedures, and to support increased vacation requests during the summer months at Lake View. Recruitment of RNs and other health care professionals is very challenging at this time, but we will continue doing everything possible, including signing bonuses, to recruit more staff nurses and other health care employees to Lake View to support our hard-working teams as we continue to grow.

Lake View has not become a "divert destination" for our area hospitals as presented in the letter. Divert occurs when a larger, tertiary hospital temporarily puts a hold on patient admissions and/or acceptance of ER patients due to a lack of physical beds, staffing challenges, a lack of other required resources, etc. This has been a significant issue impacting many of the urban, tertiary hospitals across the state of Minnesota during the pandemic. Throughout the pandemic, Lake View continued to accept swing bed patients (skilled nursing facility patients located in a Critical Access Hospital), and we also accepted a limited number of lateral transfer patients from our partners at St. Luke's when we had staffed beds available. This agreement allowed St. Luke's to free up some of their inpatient beds in order to accept critically ill patients who required a higher level of care from Lake View and from other rural hospitals across the region. There were numerous instances when Lake View's nursing leadership declined specific lateral transfer requests due to staffing concerns and/or other resource limitations. Lake View was also required to keep some ED and hospital patients longer than we would have pre-pandemic due to the tertiary hospitals being on divert. Lake View and other area hospitals all stepped up to serve patients in their time of need throughout the pandemic.

Lake View's Guardian of Excellence Award for patient experience in 2021 was a result of the extraordinary work from every single employee in our hospital, medical clinic, and retail pharmacy in Two Harbors, and our medical clinic in Silver Bay.

Lake View's nursing leadership and HR representatives are looking forward to continuing collaborative labor management meetings (LMC) and productive negotiations. The last LMC meeting scheduled for June 23, 2022 between Lake View and our staff nurses was cancelled by the MNA/staff nurses, and we have yet to receive a response to our requests on rescheduling. We are committed to future collaboration and partnership with our staff nurses to continue serving our patients and their families.

We assure you that Lake View is safely staffed in all departments, and we appreciate the trust the community has placed in our organization and in our entire health care team.

Thank you,

Greg Ruberg, President/CEO
Brad Alm, Director of Nursing
Beth Egan, Director of Primary Care & Specialty Services
Sarah Anderson, Nurse Manager
And the rest of Lake View's Leadership Team - Nate Cavallin, Christine Dearing, Josh Fuchs, Rachel Gischia, Lynnea Jones, Katie Klessig, Terri McDannold & Laura von Goertz

Letter to the Editor

I have had the pleasure of getting to know Katey Cobbs this year. When I first heard her speak, I felt I was listening to a new community leader. My admiration for her grows by the day.

Here are a few of her many strengths:

- She cares about Two Harbors, our citizens, the workforce, our businesses and the natural beauty of our area.
- She brings to the table a voice of calm conviction.
- She has a natural curiosity, and will strive to find the answers to complex issues facing the city council.
- She sees herself as a servant of the people and pledges transparency.
- She believes the council should not stand in the way of business initiatives and entrepreneurs.
- She is passionate about affordable housing. She begins her workday searching for answers and solutions to the housing crisis currently affecting our workforce and families.
- Her energy and excitement for all things Two Harbors is contagious.

Please join me on August 9th in voting for Katey Cobbs for City Councilor at Large. Two Harbors deserves a large dose of transparency, honesty and integrity.

Thank you,
Luann Udenberg
Two Harbors, MN

CLASSIFIED ADS

AA MEETINGS: MONDAYS, 7:30 PM, Clair Nelson Center in Finland. **TUESDAYS, 7:30 PM**, Sychar Lutheran Church, Silver Bay, MN. 218-226-3914 or 218-353-7340
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FOR SALE: 1979 18' Lund Pike, 25 HP Evenrude, 2005 Yacht Club Trailer. \$1,800. **218-216-3380**

FOR SALE: 1-Ton truck, Chop Saws, Table Saw, Chest Freezer, Torch Set. Call **218-220-8946**

Group Living with Anxiety and Depression (GLAD), a confidential peer support group, is online (zoom) second and fourth Mondays at 6:30 pm. Contact North Shore Mental Health Group on Facebook or email: nsmentalhealth@gmail.com.

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- **2 BR, 1 BA** house with wide open basement. Total remodel! Granite counters. Vinyl plank flooring, stainless steel appliances. Clean! Cozy! \$1,400/mo.
- **2 BR, 1 BA**, cozy, walk-out bsmt. apt. on Lax Lake. Enjoy a fire by the lake and all the amenities of lake life. All utilities, lawn & snow removal inc. No kids. \$1,400/mo.
- **2 BR, 1 BA** in country on Airport Rd, beautiful, HUGE fully furnished (just bring your toothbrush). All utilities, lawn and snow removal included. No kids/pets \$1,500/mo.