

Hospital Client Alert – 2005

Organizing Activities Aimed at North Carolina's Registered Nurses

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North Carolina hospitals, traditionally a group with little concern of being the target of union organizing efforts, should take heed. The National Nurses Organizing Committee ("NNOC"), an arm of the California Nurses Association ("CNA"), appears to have North Carolina in its sights. The NNOC is a relatively new national union and professional organization for direct care Registered Nurses. CNA, the largest state nurse association in the country, founded NNOC in the Spring of 2004. CNA openly promotes itself as the alternative to what it characterizes as the American Nursing Association's "legacy of failure for direct care nurses."

RN to staffing ratios, mandatory overtime, floating policies and wages are just a few of the issues on which CNA has focused its efforts. With about 58,000 members in 165 facilities in California, CNA was very involved in passage of California's staffing ratio legislation and continues to fight aggressively for that legislation. NNOC is a vehicle by which CNA can take its work and message to a national platform. NNOC's program includes a promise of aggressive campaigns in every state to organize all non-union RNs. For its part, CNA has committed to share its resources and experiences to help expand this national movement and support new members. As part of this national organizing effort, NNOC has launched an aggressive direct mail initiative.

NNOC has contacted nurses throughout the nation with mailings which contain information about its agenda and efforts in California. As a follow-up to its direct mail outreach to RNs, the NNOC has scheduled a series of CEU events at thirteen locations. Although the advertised topic for these seminars is patient care, the course description acknowledges the organizing purpose: "... [the class] addresses mechanisms through which RNs can build stronger organizations to secure RN control over professional practice in clinical settings." According to NNOC material, locations for these upcoming classes were chosen based upon favorable response to its direct mail outreach in those areas.

Two of the thirteen seminars are scheduled for North Carolina, in Charlotte on February 2 and Raleigh on February 3. That North Carolina has attracted two of the thirteen events and, along with Georgia, is one of only two Southern states to host these events signals particular interest in the state. Further, CNA is seeking, through union job clearinghouses, to fill organizer positions for North Carolina. These positions will be filled by individuals whose full time job is to secure union membership through organizing the nursing population in North Carolina. NNOC's decision to conduct two of its CEU classes here in North Carolina and to hire organizers signals a commitment of resources to this state. Thus, although NNOC has vowed aggressive campaigns in every state, North Carolina appears to be one of the states included in its initial push. North Carolina Hospitals should follow NNOC's activities closely and have an action plan for addressing any targeted activity.

For more information, feel free to contact Charlie Edwards (919-755-2184;) or Lucretia Guia (336-721-3724;). Charlie and Lucretia are attorneys in Womble Carlyle's Labor and Employment Practice Group who regularly advise hospital and healthcare clients with respect to labor and employment matters.

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