

For immediate release:  
Thursday, June 1, 2017

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## **Bergen County hospital ordered to remedy workplace violence, workers demand further actions**

Healthcare workers at Bergen Regional Medical Center (BRMC) represented by HPAE, NJ's largest healthcare union were informed by Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) that an agreement was reached to address violent incidents at the hospital. The settlement agreement between the Occupational Safety & Health Review Commission (OSHRC) and BRMC management was finalized on May 31st.

After reviewing the settlement, HPAE has concerns with the assessed fines, misinformation cited in the agreement and whether this settlement does enough to improve violent prevention safety measures.

"Workers at the hospital are monitoring incidents and threats inside the facility to bring to the attention of BRMC administrators. It is the efforts of workers calling for improvements based on their day to day experiences that will go farther to create a safe environment than this settlement represents," said Bernie Gerard, Vice-President of HPAE.

The settlement is related to citations issued by OSHA in response to a complaint filed by the HPAE in 2015 after a spate of particularly violent attacks on staff. According to the settlement agreement, OSHA assessed a fine of \$14,000 on BRMC for violations found at the time of inspection, relating to the lack of effort on the part of hospital's for-profit operator to provide an environment free from workplace violence.

"Given the history and extent of workplace violence at BRMC, a fine of \$14,000 is just considered the cost of doing business, a slap on the wrist," stated Gerard. "Healthcare workers are tirelessly attempting to improve policies and procedures to protect workers and patients from potentially violence, and this settlement is a missed opportunity to hold management's feet to the fire in making significant improvements for worker and patient safety."

The settlement outlines rigid controls for conducting meetings, training committee members, conducting hazard analysis, performing accurate incident reporting, and tracking violent patients. The union applauds these measures, yet disputes management claims made in the settlement.

"Theoretically meetings are scheduled, but management does not provide staff the time to take time off to attend meetings. Despite the smoke and mirrors that management has created, workers continue to raise concerns and speak out against managements' disregard for improving violence prevention," added Gerard.

BRMC has an extensive history of patient assaults on staff, with nearly 290 reports of assault in 2015 alone.

"It is a travesty that BRMC management is allowed to whitewash the hospital's blatant unwillingness to provide a safe work environment for its staff," said Jordan Barab, former Deputy Director of OSHA under President Obama. "It is particularly egregious that despite hundreds of documented incidences of violence, BRMC is not required to hire a qualified outside consultant to provide an unbiased assessment of workplace conditions. It is clear the current management team either lacks the skills or interest in conducting a true workplace violence prevention program, and that places workers' lives at risk every day," added Barab.

The conditions of the settlement go into effect immediately. OSHA will conduct an inspection at the end of two months as a follow-up to the mandated controls.