

Nurses ink three-year contract

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Nurses at Lower Bucks Hospital quietly reached labor agreements Monday, after about two months of negotiations with hospital management.

The three-year contract is the second the nurses have settled since forming a union in 1997.

After weekly sessions since April, the nurses and hospital management at the Bristol Township facility agreed on a number of terms, such as recognition of staff seniority, long-term wage increases and limiting insurance fees paid by nurses.

Other terms dealt with working conditions and retaining nurses, such as the preference of full-time nurses over temporary staff and the establishment of a professional practice committee focusing on education and certification.

"I think the negotiation sessions, in general, went very well," said Paula Smith, human resources director for Lower Bucks Hospital. "There was a positive tone on both sides. I think the concern of the hospital — for the patients and the nurses — was evident."

Jerry Silberman, a representative of the Nurses Association of Lower Bucks Hospital, said the hospital's release from Temple University last year was a major factor in the relatively smooth contract settlement.

"The main thing that made it different was that we were negotiating with the managers of Lower Bucks Hospital and not Temple," Silberman said. "It was critical dealing with management whose sole focus was the good of the hospital."

During 1998, the nurses held a series of one-day strikes because they said Temple was unwilling to negotiate their labor terms. The hospital approved a contract Dec. 8, 1998, the day before the nurses planned a three-day strike.

When Lower Bucks Hospital ended its affiliation with Temple about a year ago, the management chose to extend the current contract by a year until June 29 so negotiations wouldn't occur during the transition, Silberman said.

"The union has acknowledged that over the course of the past year, the relationship with the hospital has improved," Smith said. "We are communicating better about hospital issues."

"It was a much more respectful process than four years ago," Silberman said.

The Nurses Association of Lower Bucks Hospital became a local branch of the Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals about two years ago, a PASNAP spokesperson said.

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