

Sullivan County NH

Type of meeting: Board of Commissioners – Executive Session
Meeting Minutes – Per RSA 91-A:3.II.c.
Date/Time: Tuesday, May 15, 2007; 3:35 PM
Place: Unity County Complex, Ahern Building

Attendees: Commissioners Ethel Jarvis – *Chair*, Bennie Nelson – *Vice Chair* and Jeffrey Barrette – *Clerk*; Ed Gil de Rubio – *County Manager*; Heather Presch – *Environmental Services Director*; Scott Wojtkiewicz – *S.C.H.C. Administrator*; Heidi Smith – *S.C.H.C. Director of Nursing*; Patti Koscielniak – *S.C.H.C. External Care Coordinator*; Ann LaBelle – *S.C.H.C. Director of Activities*; Patti Henderson – *S.C.H.C. Nursing Department*; Betty Fay – *S.C.H.C. Nursing*; Pam Jones – *S.C.H.C. Secretary*; Peter Farrand – *Human Resource Director*; Sam Fletcher – *Human Resource Assistant*; Brenda Temple – *S.C.H.C. Admissions Coordinator*; Julie Woodman – *S.C.H.C. Business Office Manager*; Ron McPhall – *S.C.H.C. Dietary Director*; Pattie Henderson – *S.C.H.C. Nursing Department*; Betsy Braginetz – *S.C.H.C. Social Services*; June Brunelle – *S.C.H.C. Clinical Reimbursement*; Sharon Johnson-Callum (*minute taker*).

AGENDA ITEM NO. 4.B. UNION UPDATE – PERSONNEL ISSUE, TO BE HELD IN EXECUTIVE SESSION PER RSA 91-A:3.II.C.

3:35 A motion was made, by Commissioner Barrette, to go in to Executive Session for a personnel issue [Per RSA 91-A:3.II.c.). Commissioner Nelson seconded the motion. Discussion. Mr. Gil de Rubio noted the Executive Session should include S.C.H.C. Administrator and the management team in the room. Commissioner Jarvis denied the request, noting this pertained to just an update on the Union negotiations and only wanted Mr. Wojtkiewicz to remain. Mr. Gil de Rubio debated the issue, noting the importance for all to remain. Commissioner Nelson noted he wanted to hear what the management team had to say. A roll call vote was taken. Commissioner Barrette and Nelson voted for the motion. Commissioner Jarvis did not.

3:35 Those that left the room included Greg Chanis and Aaron Aldrich.

Mr. Gil de Rubio noted they have held several meetings with Union representatives, and feel they've "turned the corner". He noted they are offering two health packages: the current one and a new source with other options; they've discussed 2 ½% increases; held heated and assertive meetings with the Union regarding call outs and agency nursing/staffing; and, up until a week ago their concerns fell on "deaf ears" and were not followed through on by Union representation. He's unsure if they will see results short term. They can't recommend the three-year contract, as there are some areas of concern in the wordage. They will be reviewing the agreement with the County Attorney and will be in a negotiating mode for quite some time.

Mr. Gil de Rubio noted S.C.H.C. management expressed concerns and wanted to be heard by the Board.

Ms. Heidi Smith stood, indicating management nominated her to read a statement on their behalf:

"We are gathered together here today to meet with the Board of Commissioners of Sullivan County with no disrespect, but to voice our concern over the present and future of Sullivan County Health Care. Not too long ago we changed the name of the facility and were given a mission to change its culture. This was much needed to launch our new services as a skilled facility and keep up with the time. We held a beautiful open house and impressed many in and out of the community with our renovations and added services. With recent bad press and letters to the editor we feel we've gone one step forward and two steps back and we are now trying to analyze what may be some of the problems.

Bad Press:

- Is upsetting to our residents – This is their home.*
- It demoralizes staff, especially those who are dedicated and work hard.*
- Our PR person spends a great deal of time refuting negative articles.*
- Referrals choose other facilities, giving us a low census, which equals low revenue, which results in a higher tax rate.*
- It creates a negative workplace.*
- Recently, we've had decreased referrals from our local hospital (VRH).*
- Bad press does not draw good job applicants.*
- Students who were listed to participate in a summer volunteer program through our Activities department have been discouraged not to by their parents.*
- Recently a speech therapist applicant for our Rehab department has delayed coming here for a time. We have contracted out for our Rehab department going on almost nine years now through Genesis with no problems, not from the public, employees or politicians. Presently, the manager of the department indicated that the morale among employees in Rehab has been low.*

Union:

- Quality of care is hindered due to staff discussing union issues.*
- Union meetings take staff off the floors during scheduled work time.*
- The discipline process is impeded by staff union negotiations:*
 - Grievances in regards to absences,*
 - Unaffected team building in regards to union involvement, and*
 - Managing the employee schedules to match facility needs in regards to grievances.*

We feel that the union is the biggest barrier to making necessary improvement to the overall efficiency and quality of care at Sullivan County Health Care. Our management team has worked diligently to create strong teams and with the Union it takes one or two disgruntled staff to wreak havoc on any plans that may have taken many months and labor hours to create. One quote: "Working with some members of our Union is kind of like fighting a lion with your hands tied behind your back." The union protects the handful of employees that are not here because they have an authentic desire to serve their fellow human beings, but rather to collect a good paycheck and good benefits and to get to keep their positions while delivering poor service – The conscientious, responsible and resident focused employees have to work twice as hard to pick up the slack.

Commissioners & Delegation:

- We would like to know why April Bartley's letter of resignation was distributed to everyone at the Commissioners' meeting. She was put at risk professionally and publicly and deserves an apology for the publicity that resulted from discussing a personnel issue in public session rather than executive session where these matters are normally discussed.*
- We question why staff are sometimes privy to information that only attendees of the executive session should know.*
- It is felt that not all but some of the delegates and commissioners have used the facility as their public "whipping boy" for their personal and political agendas and it is the staff, the facility, and ultimately the residents who suffer from the public bashings. As one resident put it to the DON after reading the last rounds of articles in the newspaper, "This is so unfair to us. I have always received good care here and they make us sound so bad." One of the ripple effects of this political warfare is that the staff are constantly refocused from the work they need to do to care for our residents. It is a huge source of frustration for them to constantly have to defend their work and their reputation, and again, it is completely underserved. Another ripple effect – continued loss of quality staff including management. The commissioners and the delegates need to not only hold management accountable for the running of the facility, but also more importantly, trust them/us to do our jobs. Things cannot be as they have always been. If you are interested in keeping the nursing home, you must begin to look at the reality of working the healthcare business and help us continue to grow into our potential. The delegation and the commissioners are separate entities but must work cooperatively together - create a more positive relationship - with the nursing care facility and each other to achieve success.*
- We respectfully request that the commissioners make a public editorial of support.*

Whether or not Genesis stays, we remain, and need positive leadership.”

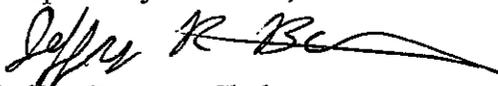
Commissioner Nelson thanked all for coming and for Ms. Smith voicing their concerns. He noted he would stand with them on the Genesis issue. He noted, as to the letter from April Bartlett, “*a lot of items, if not marked confidential, become public*”. He noted he would back a letter of support for their management team. He apologized for not being able to stay longer.

3:48 *Commissioner Nelson immediately left the room.*

Commissioner Barrette noted he was unaware of the issue regarding the letter. Ms. Smith noted she came to the meeting to discuss a private personnel issue in Executive Session and before anything could be done, the letter was read and passed out; when the issue appeared in the newspaper, it was then that April felt everyone should know the whole story so she [Ms. Bartley] submitted her letter. Commissioner Barrette stated they try to keep all in public, for transparency. Ms. Smith noted, “*A women’s career was put at risk*”. Commissioner Barrette pointed out that they have no control with editorials to the editor and suggested if residents feel they are providing stellar care, they need to urge them to publish that information. He concurred, they [the Board] need to stand up and issue their confidence [in staff]. Mr. Gil de Rubio confirmed he could draft a letter for the Board to review and sign. Ms. Smith recommended they limit the words to 500 or less, as the paper would not accept it. She also pointed out some have submitted letters to the editor of the Eagle, but they have not been published. Mr. Gil de Rubio thanked the Sullivan County Health Care team present. He noted, whenever he visits the facility he is always greeted with smiles and that the Board of Commissioners and he appreciate their work. Mr. Gil de Rubio urged the Commissioners to stand up at public meetings in support of the employees. Commissioner Barrette noted he appreciates the work they do. He asked Mr. Farrand if they could resolve the union issues and staffing issues. Mr. Farrand noted they are going through contract negotiations; as per staffing – managers have the right to discipline with warnings and to go to next level when necessary. Mr Gil de Rubio discussed the direction of reviewing the current union contract.

3:50 A motion was made, by Commissioner Barrette, to move out of Executive Session. Commissioner Jarvis seconded the motion. There was no discussion. A voice vote was taken. The motion carried, unanimously. Commissioner Nelson was absent from the vote.

Respectfully submitted,



Jeffrey Barrette, Clerk
Board of Commissioners

JB/s.j-c.

Date signed: 6/19/07