

Nurses at dozens of Calif. hospitals strike

22 September 2011, By SUDHIN THANAWALA , Associated Press



Kaiser Permanente employees walkout to protest proposed benefit cuts and a lack of progress on contract talks outside the Kaiser Permanente hospital Wednesday, Sept. 21, 2011, in Los Angeles. About 2,500 employees: nurses, social workers and therapists walked the picket Wednesday as part of a larger three-day strike across California to protest Kaiser attempt to reduce their retirement benefits and health care coverage. (AP Photo/Damian Dovarganes)

(AP) -- Nurses began picketing Thursday morning outside dozens of Northern and Central California hospitals as part of a one-day strike over benefit cuts and other concessions sought by hospital management.

The [strike](#) at 33 not-for-profit hospitals run by Kaiser Permanente and Sutter Health and at the independent Children's Hospital Oakland began at 7 a.m. Thursday, said Charles Idelson, a spokesman for the California [Nurses](#) Association, which organized the strike.

The union expects nearly 23,000 nurses to walk off the job at the hospitals, which include Kaiser facilities in Oakland, San Francisco and San Jose, and the Berkeley and Oakland campuses of Alta Bates Summit Medical Center - a Sutter Health-affiliated hospital.

Hospital officials said they have made preparations for the strike. Some Sutter Health facilities are expected to bring in replacement nurses, as is

Children's Hospital Oakland.

Children's Hospital has also rescheduled elective surgeries, said Erin Goldsmith, a hospital spokeswoman.

The focus of the planned strike is Sutter Health, where contract talks are under way at a number of hospitals.

Management has proposed a broad range of concessions that would affect nurses and patients, union officials said.

"They've taken a very hard line," Idelson said.

In addition to asking nurses to accept thousands of dollars in higher costs for their own health care, Sutter's proposed concessions would reduce the ability of certain nurses to advocate for patients, cut pay for newly hired nurses, and slash vacations and holiday pay, the union said.

Idelson said the goal of the strike is to get Sutter to withdraw its "unwarranted and unacceptable concession demands."

Karen Garner, a spokeswoman for Sutter, said the hospital offers its nurses competitive wages and salaries but has an obligation to keep [health care costs](#) down for patients.

"The union is choosing to make a sensational statement rather than offer a full picture," she said.

Union members at Children's Hospital, who have been without a contract for more than a year, have objected to a proposed increase in the cost of a [health care](#) plan the hospital offers.

The planned walkout by nurses at Kaiser is intended to show solidarity with other Kaiser employees who are in contract talks and facing demands for cuts in health and retirement benefits, Idelson said.

Kaiser Permanente said it is bargaining in good faith and has called the planned nurses' strike "disruptive to patient care and unnecessary."

The strike is scheduled for one day, but Sutter Health and Children's [Hospital](#) officials said nurses will not be able to immediately return to work because the hospitals' contracts with replacement agencies require a minimum number of days of service.

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