

# CASCADIA **DAILY** NEWS

Menu

Get unlimited local news and information that matters to you.

[Subscribe Today](#)

[News](#) | [Local](#) | [Health](#)

## HEALTH

### Two PeaceHealth unions announce 5-day strike

Hospital given notification ahead of strike that would launch on May 12

May 1, 2025 1:18 p.m. Updated May 2, 2025 9:54 a.m.



Pickers cheer as passing cars honk in support on Squalicum Parkway in January. The union is joined in announcing a strike at the hospital by Union of American Physicians and Dentists advanced care providers and hospitalists. (*Hailey Hoffman/Cascadia Daily News*)

By **ISAAC STONE SIMONELLI**

*Enterprise/Investigations Reporter*

Two out of three staff unions in negotiations with PeaceHealth St. Joseph Medical Center in Bellingham announced their intention to launch a five-day strike starting Monday morning May 12.

Union members delivered their letters of notice for the strike to PeaceHealth on Thursday, May 1, giving the medical facility the legally required minimum of 10 days notice.

The hospital has hired temporary replacement caregivers from a staffing agency, as well as existing partners, to ensure care remains uninterrupted during the strike, PeaceHealth spokesperson Amy Drury confirmed on May 2. She noted that such steps are standard practice in the health care industry.

Union workers called the strike an unfortunate but necessary action.

“The last thing we want to do is go on strike, we’d rather be caring for patients,” said Courtney Sly, a member of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Health care 1199NW and a trauma registrar who has worked at PeaceHealth for 18 years. “But we need a fair contract that prioritizes patient care by providing fair wages to our skilled and dedicated workforce.”

SEIU represents a sweeping group of more than 900 PeaceHealth employees, including technicians, lab professionals and service workers. The union’s bargaining team has sat down for more than a dozen sessions with PeaceHealth since September. Their contract expired in November.

“The community is sick and tired of the monopoly,” said Jose Reta, an MRI technologist at St. Joseph and a member of the SEIU bargaining team. “The monopoly is controlling the horrible wages, because that’s the only gig in town — and we’re standing up against that.”

The other striking group is the Union of American Physicians and Dentists (UAPD). It comprises about 100 advanced care providers, such as nurse practitioners, physician assistants and nurse midwives. The medical providers **voted to unionize in 2023**, citing increased pressures from management to fit more patients into their schedules.

“We are absolutely 100 percent standing in solidarity with our union brothers and sisters at SEIU,” said Joe Crane, an organizing coordinator for UAPD. He said UAPD and PeaceHealth “are immensely, immensely apart on wages.”

Crane said significant turnover has occurred during the year-long negotiations as workers leave for better paying jobs.

“At the end of the day they are looking at what is best for their families,” Crane said. “And we’re trying to fight to sustain Bellingham’s community of good clinicians.”

“They want to be able to take care of their patients and their community,” he added, noting that they are not being compensated at the same level as their competitors.

In addition to the notice, union representatives presented a letter of support signed by about 100 PeaceHealth physicians who support their cause, asking the hospital “settle a fair contract that recruits and retains the vital staff we need to care for our patients.”

PeaceHealth “moved minimally” in its position during the last negotiation, said Reta, who described the current offer as the “same garbage” the union has been battling for nearly eight months. The two sides remain far apart on several key issues, including wages and medical leave.

Because of this, the bargaining team decided not to present the offer to their union members, who had **overwhelmingly voted to authorize a strike** the previous week, Reta said.

“It’s time to reinvest in this community and show your care workers that you really do care,” said Reta, who was born at the hospital.

PeaceHealth’s Drury said the organization “had been eager” to resume bargaining with the unions but because of the strike will prioritize patient care, only looking to continue bargain after the strikes end. She did not acknowledge the strike by the UAPD hospitalists.

“PeaceHealth respects the rights of our caregivers to participate in these strikes and other lawful activities,” Drury said. “However, we are deeply disappointed the unions have chosen to strike.”

SEIU union workers last went on strike in 2015, voicing their frustration with wages, health care costs and staffing levels, according to The Bellingham Herald. Many of the same issues dominate current negotiations.

A separate UAPD bargaining unit of hospitalists also announced they would join the strike.

While the striking hospitalists work at St. Joseph, they are directly employed by Sound Physicians, a for-profit national labor management company. A labor ruling in June 2024 allowed the clinicians to unionize as employees of both PeaceHealth and Sound Physicians.

Nearly a year later, the parties have yet to begin bargaining, as PeaceHealth continues to challenge the National Labor Board ruling of joint employment, according to Crane.

“We are literally striking so we can get to the bargaining table and just start the process,” Crane said.

The hospitalists previously told CDN that their effort to unionize was driven by the desire to be able to better advocate for patients’ needs and create an environment that curtailed employee burnout.

“They should have the ability to advocate for their patients without fear of retaliation,” Crane said.

“We are going to hopefully send a message to PeaceHealth that Bellingham is a union town,” he added.

PeaceHealth faced additional labor pressure earlier this week when hundreds of nurses and supporters **picketed outside St. Joseph’s**. The Washington State Nurses Association (WSNA) union, representing about 1,100 nurses at the hospital **voted down** a proposed contract at the end of March.

PeaceHealth nurse Brian Martens performed a protest song he wrote set to the tune of “The Times They Are A-Changin’” by Bob Dylan at the picket.

The main issues with the proposed contract are an unsuitable insurance plan, wages that fail to support the cost of living and “disrespect from management,” according to a WSNA press release.

The nurses’ contract expired on March 31.

“I have worked for them for 20 years. It’s frustrating they are a monopoly,” said Amber Pouley, ER nurse at PeaceHealth St. Joseph, in a [WSNA press release](#). “Insurance benefits have gotten worse and worse. We are health care workers. We should have good health insurance.”

It was announced at the informational picket that the negotiators will return to the table on May 16 — on the last day of the SEUI/UAPD strike. Because the nurses are no longer under contract, they will be able to join the picket line to show support to fellow care workers.

*This story was updated May 2,*

## **Latest stories**

*Isaac Stone Simonelli is CDN's enterprise/investigations reporter; reach him at [isaacsimonelli@cascadiadaily.com](mailto:isaacsimonelli@cascadiadaily.com); 360-922-3090 ext. 127.*

### **CRIME & COURTS**

#### **Murder of young Bellingham couple remains unsolved 28 years later**

Brandi Hanowell and Loran Gavel were shot and killed in their Lettered Streets apartment

*May 6, 2025 9:00 p.m.*

### **COMMUNITY**