



Health

Kaiser and Unions Reach Agreement

Five-year Labor Pact Brings Annual Raises, New Voice for Frontline Staff

Health care giant Kaiser Permanente and a coalition of 25 AFL-CIO unions have released the details of the largest-ever national contract agreement in the health care industry.

Under the terms of a five-year tentative agreement, workers will receive annual 4% across-the-board wage increases; with 4% to 6% increases for registered nurses, nurse practitioners and physician assistants.

The package also includes many health benefit improvements including new and improved coverage for departments, domestic partners, prescription drugs, durable medical equipment, and more.

The tentative agreement also includes a first-ever structure for joint labor management decision-making throughout the organization, covering areas such as staffing, quality service, finance and budget, education and training, health and safety, performance and flexibility, and

pension investments.

The new pact covers Kaiser Permanente workers in Oregon, and several other states.

The agreement sets a new standard in the flashpoint area of staffing. Joint labor-management staffing teams will create an annual staffing plan for each department covered by the agreement. The plan will cover mutually acceptable numbers, mix and qualifications of staff in each work unit.

"No other health care employer has worked with unions to create mechanisms for this specific scope and depth of employee involvement," said Peter DiCicco, chair of the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions. "At Kaiser Permanente, patients can be certain that front-line care providers, not bureaucrats, are making decision about their care," said Kathy Sackman, president of United Nurses Associations of California, AFSCME.

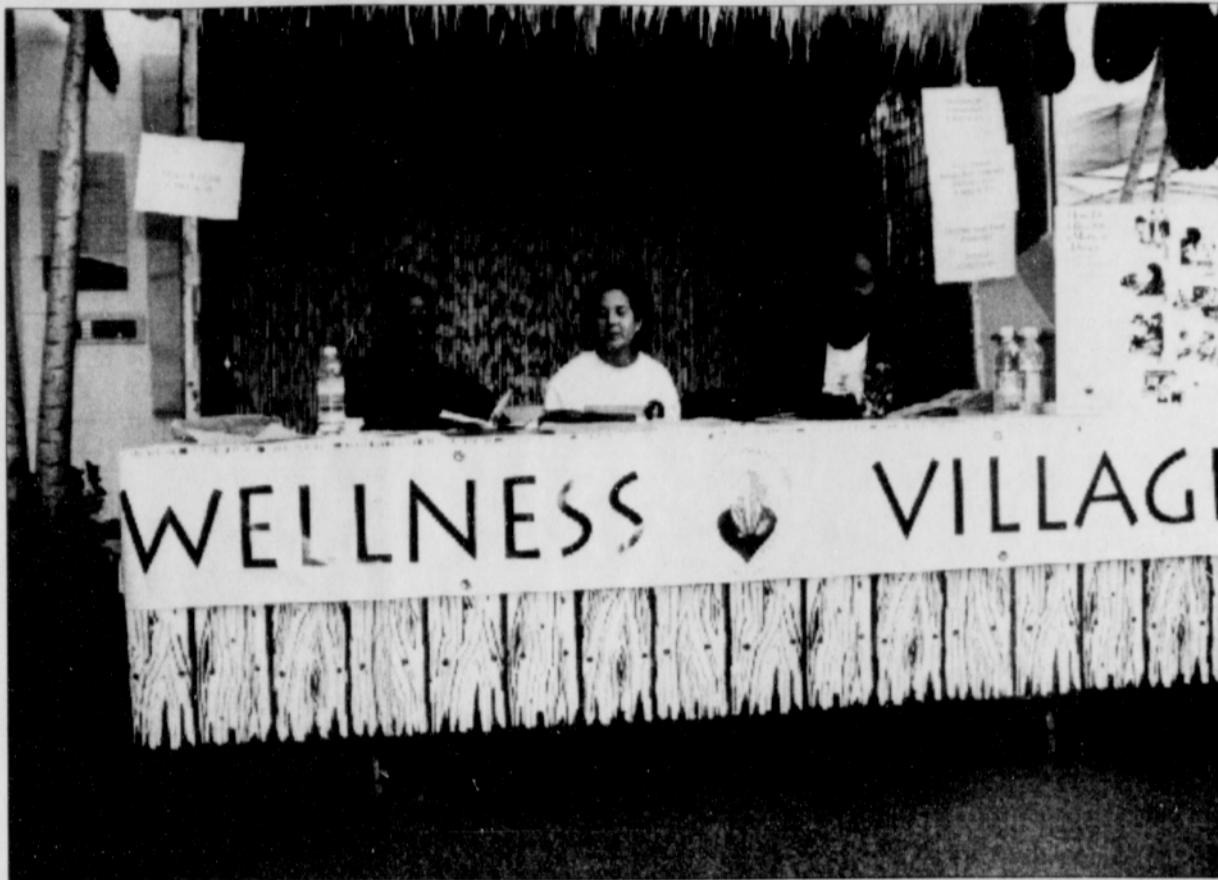
Firm Pleads No Contest

Attorney General Hardy Myers recently announced that HealthTek, Inc., a Vancouver based company that provides medical supplies to customers in Oregon and Washington, pleaded no contest to a felony charge of Making False Claims for Medicaid Health Care Payment.

Following the plea, Marion County Circuit Court Judge Erik Larson prohibited the company from

submitting claims to Medicaid in Oregon and ordered the company to pay \$569,600 in restitution and agency investigative costs by Oct. 22.

HealthTek owners Suzanne and John Robert Jr. of Vancouver also are excluded nationwide from owning, operating or being employed by any health care entity that receives federal health care money.



Promoting and improving wellness among African Americans will again be the goal of the 5th Annual Wellness Village. Free community events focusing on diabetes, health screenings, education and awareness are scheduled Oct. 15, 4 p.m.-7:30 p.m. at Emanuel Hospital's Lorenzen Center; Oct. 21, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. at Self Enhancement Inc.; and Oct. 21 at the African American Men's Prayer Breakfast at 7:30 a.m. at Mt. Olivet Baptist Church.

Well Supplies Turned Off

Bull Run is Again Only Source for Portland's Water Needs

The City of Portland Bureau of Water Works is no longer drawing supplemental summer water supplies from the Columbia Southshore wellfield.

The city started drawing about 30 million gallons a day (approximately a 20 percent mix of well water to Bull Run water) from the wells back in early August. This was one of two additional supply options to help stretch the city's water storage through the peak summer season.

In addition to 30 million gallons

a day from the wells, the city releases 800 million gallons from Bull Run Lake between Aug. 16 and Sept. 11.

"Summer is our period of peak demand, of course," acknowledged Michael Rosenberger, Water Bureau Administrator, "and this has been a dry summer. In addition to normal peak use, we also have a commitment to release water into the lower Bull Run River during the summer and into the fall to benefit

juvenile steelhead and adult Chinook salmon. Using the wells and Bull Run Lake gives us flexibility to meet multiple demands and maintain high water quality."

"We expect our reservoirs to start refilling in October," noted Rosenberger, "and if they don't we can always turn the wells back on to augment supply. Given current weather predictions, we feel comfortable saving our rate-payers the additional pumping costs."

Lead Poisoning Questions Answered

Multnomah County Health Department's new lead poisoning information line will make it easier for county residents to get information about childhood lead poisoning prevention, as well as information and referrals for local lead programs and services.

The LeadLine can be reached at (503) 988-4000. Spanish, Russian, and Vietnamese interpreters are available as needed.

The Health Department also announced the availability of childhood blood lead level screening at free immunization clinics held every week at various locations throughout the county. Blood lead level screening is recommended for children 6 months to 6 years of age who live in older, pre-1978 housing. Interested parents or guardians can call the LeadLine for clinic locations and hours.

"Childhood lead poisoning is of great concern to parents and health professionals in our community," states Lynne Weidel, Lead Poisoning Prevention Program Manager. "The Health Department is working to prevent and control lead hazards and support children and families who may be at risk. Lead poisoning can cause permanent damage, but it is also completely preventable."

Lead is recognized as one of the most significant health threats to children. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that nearly one million American children under the age of six have elevated blood lead levels.



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