

Healthcare Unions Confront the Ebola Crisis

Session Abstract:

The recent Ebola crisis has highlighted the fact that hospitals can be dangerous workplaces. Nurses' unions, in particular National Nurses United (NNU), have been very vocal in calling attention to the dangers facing registered nurses (RNs), as well as other healthcare workers, as a result of the Ebola outbreak in the United States (US). This session will focus on the role played by healthcare unions in the Ebola crisis of the last few months in the US. It will include a discussion of the potential for union- management collaboration to address this hazard, and other safety and health issues in healthcare settings.

Session Description:

The recent Ebola crisis has highlighted the fact that hospitals can be dangerous workplaces. Exposure to contagious diseases is only one safety and health hazard that healthcare workers face. Others include bloodborne pathogens, chemical and drug exposures, respiratory hazards, ergonomic hazards from lifting and repetitive tasks, workplace violence, and radioactive and x-ray hazards. One of the critical roles that unions play is to advocate for safer workplaces through contract provisions, grievance procedures, and public pressure. Healthcare unions, in particular the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and the National Nurses United (NNU), have been vocal in calling attention to the dangers facing healthcare workers as a result of the Ebola outbreak.

This session will focus on the role played by these unions in the Ebola crisis. It will include a discussion of the strategies they are employing to address the health hazards facing their members. Particular attention will be given to the potential that union-management collaboration has for addressing this hazard and other safety and health issues in healthcare settings.

Representatives of the NNU will be invited to discuss the public campaign they have mounted to draw attention to the hazards RNs face in dealing with Ebola and their successful efforts to get California to implement strict guidelines that hospitals must follow in dealing with the disease.

SEIU Local 721 and the Los Angeles Department of Health Services (DHS) have used a joint labor- management process to develop a comprehensive Ebola preparedness plan.

Representatives of the union and the DHS will be invited to discuss the plan and the process that created it.