



**JNESO**  
DISTRICT COUNCIL 1, IUOE / AFL-CIO  
*the professional health care union*

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### **For Immediate Release**

### **Help JNESO Say “Thank You” to a Hero to Celebrate Nurses Week May 6-12**

North Brunswick, N.J. -- Nursing has always been one of the most trusted professions, but since the COVID-19 Pandemic nurses and health care professionals have become “Heroes.”

“Despite the long shifts, staffing shortages, lack of critical equipment and protective gear (PPE) nurses and techs continue to do their part 24/7 in this battle against COVID-19 and to provide the best care possible for their patients,” said Elfrieda Johnson, President of JNESO District Council 1, a professional health care union representing some 5,000 nurses and techs in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

“We hope you will help us honor and recognize these amazing nurses and health care heroes by participating in our ‘Thank Your Nurse’ campaign May 6-12 during Nurses Week,” added Johnson.

JNESO’s “Thank Your Nurse” campaign encourages everyone to post a story or comment about a nurse that positively impacted your life or to just give a general shout-out to nurses everywhere to say “thank you.” Visit [ThankYourNurse.org](http://ThankYourNurse.org) to post your “thank you” and read profiles of some of JNESO’s nurse heroes.

42-year nursing veteran Mona Hartle said this situation is a bit different from other public health emergencies over the years, but the role of nurses is the same. “We are scared, but we go in and do our job and take care of our patients. That is what we all do. Only now, every night when we come home we thank God that we are still OK,” added Hartle, a Gastrointestinal Nurse at Lehigh Valley Pocono Medical Center and a resident of Henryville, Pa.

Pam Tavarone an Intensive Care Unit Nurse at St. Mary’s General Hospital in Passaic contracted COVID-19, but is committed to returning to her job once she has recovered. “If all of us turned and walked away because of the fear of illness, who would be there for these patients? Their families can’t be there. There is so much sadness and some of it is horrific, but somebody has to be there,” stated Tavarone, a resident of West Milford, N.J.

Jennie Lutze, who has worked for the Visiting Nurse Association for 19 years, pointed out that continuing to provide in-home care during the pandemic has been extremely important for patients. “It’s more than just assessing medical status. Some people don’t have a family and you are the only friendly face they see. Having that human connection goes a long way to reducing anxiety,” said Lutze, a resident of Long Branch, N.J., who volunteered to be part of the VNA COVID-19 Response team in addition to serving her normal patients.

Mitigating the fear and isolation among geriatric patients has been a priority for 22-year nursing veteran Lynne Cross at the Cedar Grove Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. “We have seen more people getting depressed. We are trying to do whatever we can to keep their spirits up: helping



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them facetime with family, providing music in their rooms, playing games from their doorways... basically, trying to interact with them as much as possible,” said Cross, a resident of Sicklerville, N.J.

So, how do these health care professionals handle the increasing stress and challenges of the job? Support from their families, solidarity with fellow nurses, and the backing of JNESO to make sure their needs are addressed, and their voices are heard by management and state and federal lawmakers.

“Personal Protective Equipment has been a huge issue, but we are also fighting for equitable resolutions for quarantines and sick leave, and to ensure breaks during increasingly longer shifts,” explained Douglas Placa, Executive Director of JNESO. “They also need access to services like counseling so they can stay physically and emotionally healthy and continue to do their job -- taking care of patients.”

Tavarone, who serves as the JNESO local president for St. Mary’s stated: “Nurses really need to band together and realize that there is strength in numbers. We can make a difference in the world, but we need to speak up and be there for each other.”

JNESO member Dawn Kulach, a Medical-Surgical Nurse from Sicklerville, N.J. has been in the spotlight doing just that since she was sent home and later lost her job for bringing her own PPE to work, an N95 mask and gloves not issued by the hospital, to protect against COVID-19 exposure.

“It is not just about me, I am trying to make it safer for all of us,” said Kulach who has been featured in the news as part of an awareness campaign to foster change. “How can I advocate for my patients if I can’t advocate for myself and my co-workers? I can always find another job, but you can’t give someone back their life.”

The hospital did change the policy to allow masks brought from home, but Kulach, with the support of JNESO, is still fighting so she can get back to what she loves: caring for patients.

The outpouring of support for nurses and health care workers during the pandemic has caught many nurses by surprise.

“We have always been well respected, but it is amazing to see the entire country pointing out health care workers and how important our role is,” described Hartle.

But most don’t seem comfortable with the label “Hero.”

“Most of us will say that we are not heroes,” said Lutze. “We are nurses. This is our job and this is what we chose to do.”

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