

Guyana Public Service Union

Message from the President, Mr. Patrick M. Yarde on the Occasion of International Nurses Day 2023

International Nurses Day (IND) 2023 is being celebrated under the theme “Our Nurses. Our Future.” The theme is clearly indicative of a basic fact that an investment in Nurses is an investment in our future.

The Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) in its message for IND 2022, represented that "Every citizen Countrywide, at some point of his or her lives, would have experienced the wonderful care of persons within the nursing profession and without a doubt have reminisced on the effects of this service on their lives. There is no one, who could justifiably deny the positive effects that Nurses would have had on his or her life."

The recognition of this fact also caused the GPSU to write to President Ali to bring relief to healthcare workers, whose perennial sufferings were overlooked over many decades. As if in response to the GPSU's missive the Head of State announced adjustments to some nursing categories, which rather than assuage the needs of the nursing population, created disruptions in the status quo and leaving more questions than answers. The GPSU would like to make it clear that had Government engaged the Union in the collective bargaining process, the outcomes of those awards would have been satisfactory.

Nevertheless, GPSU took prompt action to bring to Government's attention the disruption of relativities that were scientifically considered and established with full merit, as well as, the fact that it continues to ignore the recognition given to Trade Unions by the Constitution and other Laws of Guyana, International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 87 concerning Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining Convention 98 and the Labour Relations (Public Service) Convention 151 that were all ratified by the Parliament of Guyana and are in force, together with the legally binding Collective Agreement for the Avoidance of Settlement of Disputes, between the Government of Guyana and the GPSU that is embodied in the 1987 Public Service Rules.

“It is very unfortunate and destructive that” Government continues to push the narrative that it implemented initiatives “to cushion the effects of the cost of living” crises, but fails to clarify how this impacted all Public Servants, inclusive of the nursing population. For example, take the case of the removal of excise tax on gasoline was one such measure, but the price of gasoline is still in excess of \$200 per liter and this factor has resulted in increased transportation costs, which has had a domino effect on cost of putting food on the table. If Government really wanted this to have the “trickle down” effect it suggests

in the narrative, the proper thing to do was to add a subsidy to the cost of gasoline to enable it to return to the pre-inflationary cost of around \$125 per liter. Another measure quoted was the “Because we Care” cash grant that benefits only parents with school aged children. Nurses and other Public Servants, who fell outside of the catchment criteria would not benefit.

Again, GPSU has had cause to remind Government that bettering the lot of Nurses and other medical professionals also requires other inputs, such as:

- Improved remuneration: The salaries Nurses should be improved by at least seventy-five percent (75%) and de-bunching of these professionals enabled to provide for clear distinction of seniority, together with the reinstatement of annual merit increments. This would enable these professionals to manage themselves and their households financially, while reclaiming their lost dignity within society that was surreptitiously removed over the years, as well as, payment of a risk allowance in compensation for performing in certain positions. These improvements in remunerations should be adorned by a suitable tax-free allowance that offsets any increased taxation the salary increases may have attracted. The registration fee imposed under law, as a practice requirement for nurses, should be paid by Government, the Employer.
- Duty-free Concessions: In addition, Nurses from the level of Staff Nurse/Midwife and above should be granted duty-free concessions for motor vehicles. This would contribute to a more valuable, reliable and necessary relationship with these categories of nursing personnel.
- Hours of Work Considerations: In order to alleviate tiredness during shifts and decrease possibilities of malpractice, a recommendation was made for shorter hours of work to be contemplated, considered and implemented.
- Night Premium and Transportation: Nurses on night shifts should be paid night premium rates, equivalent to “time and one quarter” of hours worked. Transportation should also be provided for Nurses, who are required to go to work or come off from duty at very late hours.
- Continuous Education and Training: To ensure that Nurses are availed with all skills necessary for the job, all personnel should be availed with free training scholarships and sabbaticals, up to university Masters and Doctoral levels, where necessary. In turn, these practitioners should be bonded to serve the Country for stipulated time periods.

- Succession Planning: There is a need for professional and enlightened Human Resources Management within hospitals, health Centers and Clinics, which would ensure that on-the-job coaching, training and supervision provides an adequate basis for upward mobility of Nurses, which is free from victimization and other forms of discrimination.
- Upliftment in Work Environments: In general, hospitals, health Centers and Clinics should be refitted to make them more workers friendly. There should be adequate furnishings, restrooms, lunchrooms and washrooms for Nurses on duty. The absence of these facilities at all work venues creates logistical nightmares for these professionals during the execution of duties. Even with such facilities, lack of maintenance and servicing also creates such negative effects. These improvements would definitely contribute to the much-deprived job satisfaction and improve motivation, performance and productivity.
- Upgrading of existing Nurses' Hostels and Quarters and Establishment of Functional Hostels for Nurses in Administrative Regions and Sub-Regions, where none exist: Accommodation for Nurses in all Administrative Regions needs either to be established or upgraded, maintained, and properly furnished to meet the continuous needs of nursing personnel on transfer, whether they are married or unmarried.
- Trained and Experienced Human Resources Management Personnel: The GPSU has repeatedly expressed its concern with the authoritarian and disrespectful treatment of Nurses and other healthcare professionals in Guyana by inexperienced and possibly untrained human resources management personnel of hospitals and clinics that treat with Nurses matters outside of established rules and guidelines, hindering, among other things, job satisfaction and motivation, upward mobility within the profession and access to benefits, just to satiate their own emotional lust for power.
- The conditions of service for all Nurses in the Public Sector should be equated and not kept segmented, as it is currently.
- Nurses must also be viewed in their professional capacities and not be given instructions from management that contradicts with professional training.
- Sometimes to their detriment Nurses are forced to travel in uninsured ambulances. Some have lost their lives obeying such demands, but families of the deceased have suffered because there are no mechanisms in place to adequately compensate them, outside of basic superannuation benefits. To alleviate this problem Government

should subscribe to life and health insurance coverages for all nursing staff, while ensuring that they are given annual medical check-ups, as a condition of service.

As noted previously, the haphazard manner in which Government tried to implement increases in salaries for some nursing personnel, as opposed to others resulted in anomalies during the imposition of these increases. GPSU has written to the President to have these glitches corrected, but to date there has been no response. The Union would remain resolute and steadfast in the matter, until a professional approach is taken to correct these errors.

On behalf of the Executive Council, staff, and general membership of the Guyana Public Service Union, I salute you for the sterling contributions you have made to providing quality healthcare to the nation regardless of the disadvantages you were made to confront and overcome, while discharging your duties. You are deeply valued and appreciated. GPSU assures you of its continued support in the struggles to earn merited and deserving recognition and respect for the indispensable quality service provided annually to the people of Guyana.

A Happy International Nurses Day 2023 to Nurses in Guyana and those who have left these shores in search of betterment.

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