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COALITION OF
KAISER PERMANENTE
UNIONS

THE VOICE OF UNIONS AT KAISER PERMANENTE

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National Negotiations
Update



THE THIRD SESSION of national bargaining was held from April 10-12 in San Jose.

“We’ve had a long week and we’ve worked hard,” said John August, executive director of the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions, at the conclusion of the three-day session. “Observers and especially first-time participants have added so much to the process.”

“Our work here has really strengthened my belief in what can be accomplished through interest-based bargaining,” said Dennis Dabney, senior vice president of National Labor Relations for Kaiser Permanente. “This session exceeded my expectations going in. I want to thank everybody involved for their great work.”

This week, the more than 140 members of the **Common Issues Committee (CIC)** as well as some 130 observers continued to meet in issue subgroups, where they worked on finalizing their mutual interests and brainstorming options that might address those interests. Each subgroup focuses on one of the five issue areas of the negotiations: benefits; growth of KP and the unions; improving and enhancing the Partnership; total health; and workforce of the future.

The subgroups are following the steps of the **interest-based bargaining** process, which has been used to negotiate National Agreements in 2000, 2005, 2008 and 2010.

During this session, each subgroup worked to develop recommendations for the full CIC to consider. At the next bargaining session on April 24-26, each subgroup will finalize these recommendations and present them to the full CIC.

Here are some of the highlights:

Benefits

The Benefits subgroup has made substantial progress, and the subgroup members are approaching their work with a sense of cautious optimism.

“Considering the difficult task we have been charged with, we have made good progress,” said Gail Heath, a CIC member and business representative for UFCW Local 400.

Building on the work begun in earlier bargaining sessions, the group discussed how best to continue to provide great benefit programs at KP. Among the ways to do this includes education of union members to understand their benefits, their costs, and the best way to use them. The subgroup also discussed strengthening KP’s ability to recruit and retain the best employees.

Growth of KP and the Unions

The subgroup on growth is grappling with two distinct but related issues: how to better leverage the Labor Management Partnership (LMP) to help grow Kaiser Permanente membership, and how to grow the membership of the unions that make up the Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions.

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Bargaining Update continued

During the first day of bargaining, the subgroup discussed ideas like engaging more front-line employees in retaining KP members and recruiting new ones. Many union members expressed interest in getting out into the community to market KP to union members and community groups. “You see the Girl Scouts out there selling cookies,” said Cindy Klein, a UNAC member and nurse at Riverside. “Well, let’s sell our cookies.”

On the second day of talks, the subgroup took on the topic of how to help grow the membership of the Coalition unions. “For labor this was a hot topic and this was one of the topics that many of us volunteered for,” said Lamont Stone of OPEIU Local 29.

Improving and Enhancing the Partnership

The Partnership committee focused on providing support for unit-based teams and removing barriers that are preventing them from getting to the highest levels of performance.

“The success of our teams depends on ensuring that operational expenses for LMP activities and leader participation are appropriately supported,” said Walter Allen, executive director/

CFO of OPEIU Local 30 in the Southern California region.

“At the end of the day, it is about ensuring high quality patient care and establishing the best working environment for our employees and their teams,” said Barb Grimm, subgroup co-lead and senior vice president of the Labor Management Partnership.

Total Health

Total Health subgroup is developing ways to make Kaiser Permanente’s workforce the healthiest workforce in the industry and lead the way in improving the health of our families and the communities we serve.

Dave Regan, president of SEIU UHW and one of the subgroup’s union co-leads, framed the challenge facing the group: “How do we use this concept of Total Health to bring something innovative and of value to the operation as a whole?”

There is also an inspirational element to the goal — we need to model our own “Total Health” message and help our members and patients become healthier.

“Everyone needs to be a leader for Total Health,” said Tammy Jones, vice president of Healthy Workforce. “Our own employees can be such a powerful inspiration to our members.”

Workforce of the Future

The Workforce of the Future subgroup is charged with helping KP prepare for future workforce needs, especially in light of new technology, health care reform, and an aging and increasingly diverse patient and member population.

Subgroup co-leads said they would build on the strong foundation developed in previous national agreements. “There is a lot of rich, comprehensive, thoughtful language here already,” said Kelli Kane, senior director of behavioral health and LMP regional co-lead in Colorado. “We are asking, ‘What do we want to build on? What are the gaps?’”

“We are not trying to rewrite the contract. We are trying to clarify it and to make it happen,” said Diane Bertell, a subgroup co-lead and vice president and business representative, UFCW Local 770.

Positions that are hard to fill were a top concern of the Workforce of the Future subgroup. In September 2011, a committee on the topic formed as a result of the 2010 National Agreement offered recommendations on how to recruit and retain workers in hard-to-fill jobs. Labor and management members of the subgroup discussed ways to speed up implementation of the report’s recommendations.

There are two more bargaining sessions scheduled: April 24-26 and May 6-8.

For more information, see www.bargaining2012.org.

