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Rockville General Hospital Tech Professionals Choose "Union YES to Do Right by Our Patients"

Medical technicians and therapists employed by Prospect Medical Holdings vote for labor representation in negotiations over workplace conditions, wages and benefits

Vernon - Surgical technologists, psychiatric technicians, licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and other technical professionals at Rockville General Hospital (RGH) today empowered themselves as patient advocates by voting to form a union in their workplace. The employees cast ballots in the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB)-supervised election three weeks after seeking voluntary recognition from Prospect Medical Holdings, Inc. of their choice for exclusive representation. The vote codifies negotiating rights for 96 caregivers at the for-profit company's Eastern Connecticut Health Network (ECHN)-managed hospital.

"Choosing 'Union YES' was about empowering ourselves to do our jobs," said Cheri Laska, a surgical technologist in RGH's operating room with over three decades of experience at ECHN. "Now we'll not only be heard on our concerns about running short-staffed, we'll have a seat at the table with management to do something about it. We need to keep good people to do right by our patients," added Laska, also a member of the RGH LPNs and Technical Employees United organizing committee.

Laska's comments refer to short-staffing and related safety issues, which were cited as among the primary factors she and her colleagues sought to resolve through union representation. Collective bargaining rights will provide the technical professionals the means for improving their working conditions, in addition to gaining additional employment benefits and boosting their economic power.

"Today's vote is truly a 'win-win-win,'" said Hayley Ziolk, who has worked for the past year as a psychiatric technician in the Walden eating disorder unit at RGH. "More support and better pay for us as caregivers will in the long run take some stress off of management and ensure our patients get what they need. Forming a union was never just about us as employees; we're a community hospital," added Ziolk, who also served on the organizing committee.

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Ziolko's comments are reinforced by an Institute for the Study of Labor (IZA) report on the quality of care in hospital settings where staff have won collective bargaining rights. The authors of "Nurse Unions and Patient Outcomes," published in 2016 by Cornell University's Industrial and Labor Relations School (ILR), concluded that successful organizing drives yielded better results for patients.

"The techs at Rockville have taken a big step toward a fairer balance of power with one of the region's largest private sector employers," said AFT Connecticut President Jan Hochadel. "Their vote means the vast majority of Prospect's workforce at its ECHN facilities have a collective voice in their day-to-day relationship with their patients. The local economy will improve now that more of their caregivers have a means for winning better pay, securing stronger benefits and a path to solving problems," added Hochadel.

Hochadel's comments refer to the vote bringing the new unit into AFT Connecticut, which since 2010 has represented the 100 registered nurses (RNs) at RGH. The facility's 150 service, environmental, maintenance and other support staff last November also voted to form a union with the labor federation. Over 500 RNs, technical and other healthcare professionals at the ECHN-managed Manchester Memorial Hospital are also represented by AFT Connecticut affiliates.

Members of the organizing committee will next focus efforts on assembling a negotiations team made up of their colleagues to represent them in contract talks with ECHN and Prospect management.

AFT Connecticut, the largest union of acute care hospital workers in the state, represents approximately 800 nurses, technical professionals and support staff at Prospect Medical Holdings' facilities in Manchester and Vernon. Visit www.aftct.org for more information and follow the labor federation on Twitter at [@AFTCT](https://twitter.com/AFTCT) and on Facebook at [AFT Connecticut](https://www.facebook.com/AFTConnecticut).

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Links --

AFT Connecticut Video: "Tech Professionals at Rockville Hospital Unite for Strength"
<https://youtu.be/LdlutWml2vc>

ILR Review: [Nurse Unions and Patient Outcomes](http://ilr.sagepub.com/content/early/2016/04/20/0019793916644251.abstract)
<http://ilr.sagepub.com/content/early/2016/04/20/0019793916644251.abstract>