



# Talisa J. Hardin

Chief Nurse Representative, National Nurses United (NNU),  
University of Chicago Medical Center, (UCMC) | Chicago, Illinois

***“Every day you get to see that what you do makes a difference.”***

Registered nurse and nurses’ union representative on advocating for adequate staffing  
and for nurses to stay home when sick

*Chicago native Talisa Hardin is a registered nurse who started her career at a non-union hospital, Advocate Christ Medical Center. In 2006, she took a position on the burn unit at UCMC, a union-represented hospital. Hardin graduated from Saint Xavier University with a Bachelor of Science degree in nursing.*

*Hardin says that she is equally passionate about nursing and her role as one of two chief nurse representatives with the NNU, a union that represents nearly 185,000 registered nurses and organized over 6,500 nurses in 2010, its first year as a union. She advocates for her fellow nurses, organizes other nurses, and serves on the bargaining team. Her passion for both nursing and her union stems from a desire to ensure that her nurses are able to provide the very best care for their patients. She says advocating for appropriate staffing levels is one of the most critical ways to meet this goal.*

*For workers in helping professions such as nursing, collective bargaining agreements create safe and respectful places for workers to sit down with management and come up with solutions to inefficiencies and workplace practices that could harm both the worker and the patient. Hardin embraces her leadership as an opportunity to effect positive change for her patients and for her colleagues who put patient care above their own needs.*

I am a registered nurse, and work in the burn unit at UCMC, which is a special treatment unit. I completely love working there. I've been there for about eight years. The best part about where I work is that we take the journey with the patient. Most nursing units only take care of the patient in phases—either when they are at their sickest, or when they're not as sick and they work to get them to discharge. We get them at their sickest and work with them through the whole cycle. We actually send most of our patients home from our unit. Every day you get to see that what you do makes a difference.

enough nurses to properly take care of patients is our biggest battle all the time.

We're also advocating that nurses should not have to work when they are sick. Hospitals have a business to run, so they make policies that require you to work even when you're sick. If you don't come in, there's trouble. But if nurses come in to work sick, I don't know how well they can care for others who are sick.

I'm one of two chief nurse representatives for NNU at the hospital, so I also advocate for my fellow

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My first hospital was not a union hospital. I worked there almost two years and I decided that I needed to change. That's how I ended up going to UCMC, which is a unionized hospital. One of the reasons I was attracted to the hospital had to do with it being a unionized hospital. I didn't know much about unions before working at the UCMC. I just knew that a union was a good thing, and that whenever people join together to work for something good, then good things happen.

We have a lot of things going on at the hospital right now. For nurses, our biggest issues are staffing and the things that revolve around the day-to-day care of patients. Making sure we have

nurses. I don't like to see people treated unfairly. My counterpart is also black, and she was actually serving as a representative before me. She kind of pulled me into it and made me do it.

One of my favorite things to do is talk to nurses. I could probably talk to nurses all day long. Anytime there's a need for organizing, I'm one of the first people to jump up and go. Black women and women of color are good at organizing because we're so passionate. If we really believe in something, then it must be something good and we can get anybody to join up. But in the labor movement in general, there's not a lot of organizing going on. And when you don't see it going on, something is wrong.

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NNU is doing a lot of organizing. We're going out and we're telling other nurses, "Let's join together and make it better." That's why you see that we're doing so well as far as organizing nurses across the country. I think that the labor movement as a whole doesn't have that passion anymore, and is just not making that effort.

Our team at UCMC is pretty diverse. We have good representation. But when you look at our union as a whole, black women are pretty much missing. There aren't a lot of us.

I tend to be very busy because sometimes it takes a woman of color to actually pull the passion out of another women of color. We find that we're often going and trying to talk to people and get them to understand why we're doing what we're doing. There just really aren't many of us out there doing the work. Why? I think part of the

problem is we're black women, so we kind of have a double strike and that tends to stifle aspects of our careers. So it takes other black women to lift us up and encourage us to join in.

I do like to consider myself a labor leader. I say all the time, "Oh gosh, how did I end up here?" But I know that I've put in a lot of hours for this, and it takes up a lot of my life. As passionate as I am about nursing, I'm also very passionate about the union. So to say that I'm not a labor leader would be a lie.

I don't ever think about seeing my leadership grow. I think, "What can I do that helps propel us to a better place?" If I do that, then I've done my job. So I've never thought about where I personally want to go, but where I want to see nurses go.