

# NEWS

## Nurse Channel

A lawsuit by a nurse against her former employer goes behind the scenes at SVMH.

By Mary Duan

**T**he critical care nurse was 10 hours into a hospital shift when she was finally able to take a break. She went into a break room, pulled out her cell phone, opened up the camera and shot a short video, telling her Twitter and Instagram followers it had been a rough day and asking them to send her funny jokes or memes to lighten the mood. She didn't mention any patients, she says, nor her place of work.

In a second instance, the nurse was on a break and on her phone shooting a quick video about a day in the life of a nurse when a code was called, a signal for all hands on deck to come running. She said, "Gotta go" into the camera, put the phone away and went to assist with the patient in distress. Rachel Muscutt had amassed a large social media following due to *LivePD*, a reality TV show that featured her husband, Salinas Police Officer Mike Muscutt.

Shortly after she posted the videos, she says she was called into a supervisor's office, admonished that she was violating hospital policy and told to take down the videos. She was also accused of failing to respond to a patient in a timely manner, ordered into a Skelly

**"[Nurses] should feel free to go to HR with complaints."**

hearing, a process in which a public employee hears allegations made against them and has the chance to refute them prior to the imposition of discipline, and then fired. The hospital, she says, also has asked the California Board of Registered Nursing to rescind her license for negligence.

Muscutt is in the office of her attorney, John Klopfenstein, as she tells her story. In December she sued Salinas

Valley Memorial Hospital, alleging that a pattern of harassment and discrimination preceded her firing last July.

The harassment, Muscutt says, included a verbally abusive supervisor who waved a pen in her face and referred to her as "little girl" and other name calling that ramped up after a patient's mother physically assaulted her at work, and Muscutt complained about feeling unsafe with no recourse.

"Things started to get weird when I started to make noise about the lack of policies regarding violent patients and violent family members," she says. "My floor took on a lot of patients in alcohol withdrawal and there were not policies in place for how to deal with patients spitting on you and hitting you other than to medicate and restrain them."

When the patient's mother struck her with a door, Muscutt says, she went to her manager and said she wanted to file a complaint, but told the manager

she was worried they would fire her rather than come up with a solution.

"I don't want any other nurse to be on the receiving end of violence, nor do I want any other nurse to be on the receiving end of management like this," she says. "[Nurses] should feel free to go to HR with complaints and concerns and not feel like they will be fired."

Since losing her job, Muscutt has been taking classes and is seeking licensing as a medical esthetician. She's also waiting to hear from the licensing board about the complaint the hospital filed against her.

Hospital officials declined to discuss details of the case because it is a personnel matter, but note they've hired over 12,000 people and in a statement wrote, "SVMH is committed to ensuring an environment that is free of harassment, discrimination and retaliation." The case is set for a hearing in Monterey County Superior Court on April 21. ★



Rachel Muscutt, pictured with her attorney John Klopfenstein, says that even if she wins her lawsuit against Salinas Valley Memorial Hospital, she doesn't want her job back.

MATT KOHLER



KRISTIN SOLLECITO

The number of monarchs visiting Pacific Grove's sanctuary continues to dwindle. As of Jan. 3 only 169 butterflies were counted.

## Cross Pollination

Monarch advocates flock to first summit with an eye toward saving the beleaguered butterfly.

By Pam Marino

**W**estern monarch butterflies are facing population numbers so dire—last year's count during the overwintering migration on the West Coast was less than 1 percent of an estimated historic high—some scientists are worried they will go extinct. The emergency has sparked a migration of humans hoping to help: 160 monarch advocates from 16 states are gathering in Carmel Valley from Jan. 10-12 for the first-

of-its-kind Monarch Summit 2020.

The idea was born out of talk in the fall of 2018 between grassroots advocates in southern Oregon, home to habitats where monarchs stop along the way to and from overwintering sites. They noted the dozens of nonprofits and agencies focused on helping Western monarchs that don't always talk with each other and decided it was time everyone came together and compare

notes, says organizer Robert Coffan of Southern Oregon Monarch Advocates.

They chose Monterey County for the opportunity to show attendees, some from as far away as Massachusetts and Hawaii, overwintering sites along the coast. Field trips to the Pacific Grove Monarch Sanctuary are planned all three days.

The \$175 summit quickly sold out and there are about 25 people on the waiting list. Keynote speakers Robert

Pyle, founder of the Xerces Society, and Chip Taylor, founder of Monarch Watch, are scheduled to address the summit. Other speakers include university researchers, government representatives and citizen scientists.

The summit's goal is to create a space for everyone to network, share information and "go back and do whatever they do better," Coffan says. "The end result is the monarchs will win." ★