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## CFNU POSITION STATEMENT ON MANDATORY INFLUENZA IMMUNIZATION OF NURSES

### Mandatory Influenza Immunization of Nurses: Unethical and Unnecessary

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions does not support any program or policy that requires mandatory influenza immunization for nurses or any other health care worker.

The CFNU and its member organizations do not believe that policies that place immunization as a condition of service or employment should be introduced. Further, we do not consider mandatory immunization policies in the workplace to be ethical.

The Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions represents close to 200,000 nurses and student nurses. Together with our member organizations and affiliates, we work to advance solutions to improve patient care, working conditions for nurses, and our public health care system.

As key members of the health care team, we know and trust that nurses work very hard to practice within the scope of their *Code of Ethics* to provide safe and quality patient care, and respect the value of individual choice. Nurses make decisions and take actions to ensure this many times over the course of a single shift. Mandatory immunization wrongly infers that nurses are not practicing with the best interests of their patients in mind. Of course patients need to be protected against all harm, but we at CFNU trust the highly educated professional nurses that we represent to make responsible, informed decisions for themselves and their patients with regards to infection control.

While CFNU does strongly support increasing overall immunization rates in health care workers, we argue that this should be achieved by increasing awareness, education and access to immunization, not by mandating it. The role of the employer to support access and education is critical, particularly as the evidence regarding immunization efficiency remains up for debate.

Further, employers in conjunction with joint occupational health committees, and direct care nurses should develop comprehensive influenza prevention and control strategies that include an evaluation component. Influenza immunization is one element of such strategies but other key components should include hand hygiene, personal protective equipment, adequate staffing and isolation policies.

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A comprehensive study released in October 2012 from the Center for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota asserts that policies moving toward universal recommendations for influenza vaccinations, in the past, have rarely been based on sound data.<sup>1</sup>

A comprehensive review by the Cochrane Collaboration<sup>2</sup> that studied influenza vaccination for health care workers who worked in long term care facilities concluded that there is no evidence that vaccinating only health care workers prevented lab-confirmed flu, pneumonia, and death from pneumonia. In addition, they provide examples of less invasive interventions (e.x., hand washing, masks, early detection of influenza, quarantine, restricting visitors, etc.) that also might help protect this vulnerable population, but conclude that more research is needed.

The mandatory immunization of health care workers is invasive and denies individuals the opportunity and right to make decisions about their own health and welfare. Canadian health care workers have spoken out on this issue and what they want is a culture of safety, not coercion.<sup>3</sup> It is our view that policies requiring mandatory immunization for health care workers are not rooted in sound evidence and they are unethical.

If your employer implements a program or policy that enforces mandatory influenza immunization, we urge you to get in touch with your union to learn about your rights under your collective agreement.

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<sup>1</sup> Osterholm MT, Kelley NS, Manske JM, et al. The Compelling Need for Game-Changing Influenza Vaccines: An Analysis of the Influenza Vaccine Enterprise and Recommendations for the Future. CIDRAP. 2012. Available at: <http://www.cidrap.umn.edu/cidrap/files/80/ccivi%20report.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Thomas RE, Jefferson T, Lasserson TJ. Influenza vaccination for healthcare workers who work with the elderly. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews* 2010, Issue 2. Art. No.: CD005187. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD005187.pub3.

<sup>3</sup> Yassi, A., Lockhart, K., Buxton, J.A., & McDonald, I. (2010). Vaccination of Health Care Workers for Influenza: Promote Safety Culture, Not Coercion. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 101(Suppl.1), S41-S45.