

December 04, 2020

Dr. R. Patrick Dumelie
President & CEO, Covenant Health
3033 66 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T6K 4B2

Dear Dr. Dumelie;

While the COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented challenges to health care workers and employers across the world, it has become evident that there is a particular deficiency with protecting worker safety at Covenant Health. The employer has a fundamental duty to protect workers from all foreseeable hazards, including a specific duty within healthcare to protect workers from biological hazards. Even though COVID-19 is highly infectious, it has become apparent that Covenant Health is not meeting the standard of care when it comes to protecting workers from this dangerous disease.

As of November 26th, employer SARS COV-2 testing data shows approximately 52 % (163 out of 315 cases) of Covenant Health employees, who have a confirmed case of COVID-19, contracted the disease within the workplace. In comparison, the occupational infection rate for Alberta Health Services and Alberta Precision Laboratories combined is approximately 8% (112 out of 1,477 cases). A difference of this magnitude must be explained and addressed. This is also significantly higher than the occupational infection rate of 3.1% reported in Ontario, earlier this year, among all health care worker COVID-19 cases with a documented exposure history, making Covenant Health an unfortunate outlier when it comes to workplace infections.¹ When we have raised concerns with the high number of workplace infections, Covenant Health attributes them to mistakes made by individual workers, such as coming to work sick and transmitting the disease to others. This doesn't address the root cause that's driving these infections nor does it adequately consider other factors such as work processes, accessibility and use of personal protective equipment, staffing and workload concerns, HVAC system adequacy, and other plausible root causes.

The employer has a legal duty to investigate any workplace incident and implement appropriate controls to mitigate the hazards and prevent recurrence. Covenant Health has failed to adequately address the hazard of occupational cases of COVID-19, therefore, we are requesting Covenant Health undertake the following actions immediately:

- 1) The employer engages a suitable independent health and safety firm, with occupational hygiene/medicine expertise, to conduct a comprehensive investigation of occupational exposures and transmission of COVID-19 at

¹ Schwartz, et al. (2020). Healthcare worker COVID-19 cases in Ontario, Canada: A cross-sectional study. Retrieved from: <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.06.12.20129619v1.full.pdf>

Covenant Health facilities, with priority given to the sites with the largest outbreaks, i.e. Edmonton General, Misericordia, and Grey Nuns.

- 2) The investigation consults exposed workers, other frontline staff and informal leaders such as Joint Workplace Health and Safety Committee members for recommendations to prevent workplace exposures and COVID-19 transmission in Covenant Health facilities.
- 3) The investigation produces a report with comprehensive recommendations to reduce workplace transmission within Covenant Health facilities. This report must be shared with Joint Worksite Health and Safety Committees and Union representatives. Covenant Health must then act on any recommendations to reduce occupational infections.

We know this pandemic has required a prolonged and extraordinary effort from everyone working in the health care field including leaders at Covenant Health, and this letter is not intended to be critical of any individual leader within the organization. However, this rate of occupational infections cannot continue and we must identify both why this rate is so high, as well as immediate and long-term solutions to bring the occupational infection rate to the lowest amount achievable. This is why we collectively request a fresh and independent look at this issue for the safety of all health care workers and Albertans.

Sincerely,



Mike Parker
HSAA President



Heather Smith
UNA President



Guy Smith
AUPE President

cc: The Honourable Tyler Shandro, Minister of Health
The Honourable Jason Copping, Minister of Labour and Immigration