

TEXT OF LETTER TO ALBERTA LONG-TERM-CARE OPERATORS

April 7, 2020

United Nurses of Alberta is extremely concerned that COVID-19 is now threatening our Long-Term-Care facilities. We believe it is extremely important for Employers and Unions to work together at this time to ensure the safety of staff and residents. We also believe a standard approach across the Province must be taken, rather than dealing with issues in an ad hoc basis site by site.

The current situation is rapidly leading to chaos. Some Long-Term-Care Employers are indicating they will follow the Chief Medical Officer of Health and limit employment at more than one site only if there is an outbreak. In these situations, they will not terminate an Employee who is unable to work at their sites. Other Employers are insisting on a “not more than one site” policy immediately in which case Employees will have to leave employment, or take a leave of absence, creating the staff shortage it was said the Department of Health wished to avoid. Other Employers (who are not invoking a “no more than one site” policy) are actively discouraging Employees from complying with other Employers who are doing so. Sometimes, Employees are allowed to choose the site. Other times the decision (correctly) falls with a Medical Officer of Health. But the selection of the site affects eligibility for health care benefits. We are informed that we already have one member who will suffer both a loss of income and a loss of health care benefits coverage as a result of the current situation.

We believe it is clear that having staff employed at more than one facility during this pandemic is unwise. It is also clear that we need to provide Employers flexibility in decision making to avoid critical staff shortages at specific sites. The current ad hoc approach will undoubtedly lead to dangerous situations and staff shortages.

It is also unwise to simply expect staff to suffer financially during this time. In addition, it is clear that some provisions of Collective Agreements, such as scheduling and who is permitted to perform bargaining unit work, etc., may need to be relaxed. Finally, it is extremely important that proper PPE is provided.

We strongly believe that if Employers and the Union could reach an agreement, it would be very helpful as Employee buy-in is extremely important.

Please find attached a draft Letter of Understanding we are providing to all our Long Term Care Employers.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours truly,

David Harrigan
Director of Labour Relations