

September 24, 2020

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**Dr. Verna Yiu
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Dear Dr. Verna Yiu,

United Nurses of Alberta and Alberta Health Services agreed to pause negotiations for a new collective agreement in order to focus on the COVID-19 pandemic, but UNA is concerned that in the meantime AHS has taken several actions that place Employees and patients at risk and that there is a burgeoning crisis in Alberta's health care system that needs to be dealt with immediately.

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It is well-known that COVID-19 is highly contagious and recent outbreaks at Foothills Medical Centre, Misericordia Community Hospital and other facilities across the province demonstrate the strain placed on health care workers by the transmission of COVID from staff to patients and other staff.

Although AHS implemented a screening tool to identify potential symptoms of COVID-19 and frequently discourages employees to report to work with symptoms, the Employer's failure to support staff with symptoms undermines the effort to discourage Employees from reporting to work.

Worse yet, in July 2020, the Employer advised Employees it would be renewing focus on Attendance Awareness. The intended effect of an attendance awareness program is to reduce absences from work and the effect is to have individuals report to work even when they are not feeling well. Even during a normal flu-season it is irresponsible to create an environment where employees feel obliged to report to work; during a pandemic the effects are exponential.

Staff who report to work when they may be ill place patients at risk. Employers should therefore take steps to make it easier for someone to make the right decision and should avoid steps that make it more difficult for employees to make those decisions.

The Employer's "vacancy management" program has resulted in numerous vacancies not being posted or filled, and staff being required to work additional shifts, overtime and work short staffed.

When considering its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Employer must consider not only the obvious health implications of infection but also the mental health effects of the pandemic. Employees regularly report added workplace-related stress from new workflows, additional workload, and understaffing.

Many patients, and their families, and staff, and their families, are facing mental health challenges arising from isolation, new childcare and elder care responsibilities, and loss of income/employment during the pandemic.

Despite these well-known factors, the Employer proceeded to remove financial support for asymptomatic employees who are required to isolate. For those who are already struggling financially this is a further disincentive to remain at home in the face of mild symptoms. Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses have reported these concerns to union representatives, and are feeling extremely misused and disrespected.

UNA President Heather Smith and I would like to meet with you to attempt to address these concerns.

Amongst the proposed resolutions we would like to discuss are the following:

1. The Employer agrees to ensure asymptomatic employees who are required to isolate due to possible exposure to COVID-19 suffer no loss as a result of isolation (by either assigning work that can be completed while in isolation or providing paid time by restoring the previous AFD coding);
2. The Employer agrees to discontinue its attendance awareness program for the duration of the pandemic;
3. The Employer agrees to distribute information regarding the Employee Family Assistance Plan and other mental health supports available through the Employer;
4. The Employer agrees to compensate Employees for absences arising from COVID-related family obligations;
5. The Employer immediately cease its "vacancy management" program; and
6. Any suggestions the Employer has to deal with the morale crisis.

We look forward to your response

Yours truly,



David Harrigan
Director of Labour Relations

c.c.: Kim LeBlanc, Alberta Health Services
Raelene Fitz, Alberta Health Services
Rick Mann, Alberta Health Services