

*Sample of letter sent to all health authority CEOs*

October 14, 2014

Mary Ackenhusen  
President and CEO  
Vancouver Coastal Health  
11<sup>th</sup> Floor, 601 West Broadway  
Vancouver, BC V5Z 4C2

Dear Ms. Ackenhusen:

BCNU expects that Vancouver Coastal Health will without delay implement the necessary precautions and training necessary to ensure staff and public safety in the event that a patient with suspected or confirmed Ebola virus disease (EVD) seeks care in one of your facilities.

Your health authority is **not** ready to respond to cases of Ebola. On paper things may look good, however we have been canvassing our members on designated units who advise on the ground that is simply not the case. For example, nurses have not been trained in care protocols for Ebola patients or advised and trained regarding the proper use of safety equipment. This is alarming given the recent news of a nurse who has become infected with the virus after caring for the first Ebola patient in North America.

Nurses and their families are legitimately scared. If the health system wants our members to put themselves at risk of exposure to a deadly disease we expect that every reasonable precaution be put in place on a priority basis. We cannot emphasize enough our expectation that you ensure that the implementation of your Ebola preparedness/response plan is stepped up, to ensure that it is fully operational, or, if any gaps are identified in this process they be immediately corrected. This cannot wait until there is another suspected case in an ER within the province.

BC health authorities also need to learn from other jurisdictions such as Texas. At Texas Presbyterian Hospital which received and treated the first patient with the EVD, the news reports they are now "triple-checking our full compliance with updated CDC guidelines" and are still unclear how the nurse was exposed. This is obviously cold comfort to the staff affected.

BC needs to implement the most current recommendations with respect to protecting health care workers. It is also necessary for health authorities to complete detailed simulations to ensure that front line staff are up-to-date with respect to best practices for caring for patients who may be infected with Ebola. Front line staff must receive proper education and training in how to protect themselves as well as opportunities to prepare and practice all safety procedures related to Ebola care. Utmost attention should be adhered to when training staff in donning/doffing procedures and disposal of contaminated equipment as these activities put health care workers at high risk of exposure to the virus. Informal, unscheduled, time limited sessions are unacceptable. Emailing links to information demonstrates a blatant disregard for the health and safety of staff.

Areas that currently require more attention include:

1. Providing direction and training around the assessment of patients with suspected EVD,

including safety protocols for staff.

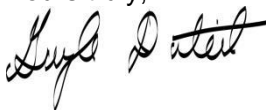
2. Direction and training on expectations for provision of safe care of patients with EVD, including staffing numbers and dedicated patient assignment.
3. PPE use - procedures for donning and doffing personal protective equipment (PPE) and implementation of a buddy system to monitor these high risk, detailed procedures.
4. Enhanced protocols with training on room and equipment set up, cleaning, and handling garbage and waste.
5. Contingency plans for where to provide care when ERs are already full.
6. Guidance for handling deceased patients with EVD.
7. Visitor management.
8. Steps to follow in the event of occupational exposure to EVD including direction on how to identify exposure.
9. Putting measures in place to ensure adequate staffing levels ie: 2:1 nursing care.
10. Process for concerns and expectations of manager/supervisor response and action on issues raised.

We expect that you will understand that given your health authority's lack of preparedness to safely provide care to suspected Ebola patients, we have no choice but to advise our members that they should only provide care to patients with suspected or confirmed Ebola if they have been provided with the proper equipment, have been trained in its use and are confident and knowledgeable about the care protocols for Ebola patients.

Nurses are professionals, they care for the citizens of your health authority. It is incumbent upon you to care for the safety and protection of our nurses.

We are confident that you will act quickly and decisively to resolve our concerns and will await your urgent response outlining the steps that you plan to employ to resolve our concerns.

Yours truly,



Gayle Duteil  
President

c: BCNU Council  
Gary Fane, Executive Director, Negotiations and Strategic Development  
Jessica Bowering, Director, Legal Services  
Lara Acheson, Director, Occupational Health and Safety  
Georgina Hackett, Occupational Health and Safety Officer  
Terry Lake, Minister of Health  
Perry Kendall, Provincial Health Officer