

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

DEBRA MCPHERSON



BCNU REJECTS EMPLOYERS' "ATTENDANCE MANAGEMENT"

CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL BCNU members around the province who have been taking our message about safe patient care and safe staffing to the public.

Nurses have been out on the streets, rallying on the sidewalks, meeting with members of the public and giving out leaflets about our key bargaining issues.

It's all about nourishing the partnership that nurses build every day with the public, as we do our best to provide quality care to patients and support to their families.

Appealing for public support is especially critical for nurses at a time when certain politicians and media pundits are questioning the value of the services we provide and why public sector workers deserve decent wages, pensions and working conditions.

Our public advocacy is particularly important when our employers, through the health authorities, are also questioning our dedication to safe patient care. Under the guise of "attendance management", certain employers are actively attempting to intimidate members – under threat of various disciplinary measures – to come to work when they're ill.

The way certain health authorities are implementing these programs is unacceptable and likely illegal. I want you to know that BCNU won't stand for it.

Our union is prepared to take legal action against health authorities, beginning with the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, where implementation has been particularly outrageous.

These attendance programs are insulting to nurses, damaging to morale and creating toxic workplaces because they assume wrongdoing and threaten harsh penalties.

I want to remind members that under our professional standards, we have a clear

responsibility not to report to work when sick, in order to protect patients. Our provincial contract allows up to 18 days a year for legitimate illness – an entitlement fairly bargained that BCNU intends to see respected. We will be reminding management of this fact at every opportunity.

Attendance management puts attendance at work – at all costs and in every circumstance – above the obligation to consider your own health and your patients' well-being. It seeks to compel attendance using intimidation, continuing harassment, and discipline.

It makes sick leave an "issue" if it's above the arbitrary threshold of "average" sick-leave taken by all employees. It reduces sick leave taken by threatening you with restriction of overtime work, reduction to part-time status, or outright firing!

No nurse should ever be forced to disclose deeply personal and confidential health information to managers in an adversarial setting with the threat of punishment hanging over their head!

In Vancouver Coastal we were scheduled to begin arbitration on April 24, 2012, but management cancelled. They want to deal with only a few of the issues and to wait until October. Failing early resolution of this problem, BCNU will also refer it to the collective bargaining table.

Please remember if you are summoned to an interview about your attendance, do not attend without taking your union representative with you to protect your rights. If you don't know who your BCNU steward is, call us (see ad page 28).

As your President and fellow nurse, I commit to you that BCNU will not accept unilateral action by management that threatens nurses and disregards your rights as BCNU members and as citizens.

Please feel free to communicate with me on this matter.

In the meantime, keep standing up for safe patient care through safe staffing. BCNU will be reminding employers – and if necessary, the public – that safe patient care equals safe staffing.

Safe patient care will not be accomplished through "attendance management" by forcing nurses under the threat of discipline to come to work when they are ill. **UPDATE**