



Newsletter

MSA Hospital a blood-smeared, filthy mess under Sodexho: News report

Abbotsford Times article reveals litany of horror stories about contracted housekeeping

A front-page story in Tuesday's *Abbotsford Times* revealed a litany of horror stories about declining standards of cleanliness at MSA General Hospital in Abbotsford since Sodexho MS Canada took over housekeeping duties in January. (go to <http://www.abbotsfordtimes.com/> for the complete article)

"Tales of blood smears in labour rooms that should be spotless, litter left behind beds in the emergency ward and inexperienced workers entering infectious isolation rooms are seeping from MSA Hospital," the article said.

The day after the article appeared, the French corporation Sodexho was awarded a 10-year, \$330-million contract by the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority for patient food services. In October, Sodexho was awarded a \$73-million, five-year contract to provide housekeeping services to 14 hospitals in the Fraser Health Authority, including Mission Memorial, MSA and Chilliwack General Hospital.

Housekeepers and nurses interviewed by the *Times* said that poor training and understaffing by Sodexho have allowed the problems at MSA General to pile up.

"First hand I have seen blood on the [labour room] floor and equipment and [birthing material] left on bassinets where newborns are placed," after the rooms should have been clean, said Christine Tremblay, one of 62 full-time and part-time workers laid off in January.

The MSA housekeeper was rehired by Sodexho within days but quit after she said she saw standards of cleanliness drop.

"It's like a sweatshop in there. It's not humanly possible to do your list of job duties in a seven-hour shift and clean properly," said Tremblay.

Added a nurse in the special care maternity ward, "Two days ago the garbage containers were overflowing, the linen baskets were absolutely stuffed. We found blood left on a bed railing. One [housekeeper] on today here is running to do her work but she's afraid to speak up."

Other reports include:

- A housekeeper quit after three days of work because she received no orientation and no training about universal precautions. On her first day, she had 90 minutes to shadow a co-worker before she was left on her own to clean six operating rooms. Her co-worker spoke

- poor English and “was emptying out vats of blood in a black garbage bag” instead of biohazard bags.
- A part-time worker who was sent to clean case rooms with no training the morning she was hired found a warning in one room indicating that the last occupant had a drug-resistant infection. After calling her supervisor, she put on a gown and double gloves but later learned that she should have wiped the walls and equipment twice instead of once.
- An extended care RN at Mission Memorial Hospital said she saw a new housekeeper try to pry open a hazardous waste sharps container to empty the contents into a garbage bag.

HEU secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt praises both Christine Tremblay for speaking out and the *Abbotsford Times* for covering the story.

“This woman showed a lot of courage, coming forward to bring attention to these problems, despite the climate of fear and intimidation many workers face when they go public,” says Allnutt.

Sodexo is a global corporation that provides food services and building maintenance in hospitals, schools, prisons and other institutions worldwide.

It has a record of industrial standards violations and union-busting activities that includes the following:

- In 2001 Sodexo was fined US\$9,450 when a high school student in Cape Cod found part of a human thumb in a turkey sandwich (the thumb belonged to a Sodexo cafeteria worker who had suffered a workplace accident involving a food slicer).
- In 2002 Sodexo hired teenaged replacement workers from army camps in Wales and England to break a strike by Scottish hospital support workers.
- At Glasgow’s largest hospital the same year, bloody clothing and scrubs were found in elevators used to transport patient meals, while soiled bags and hospital waste were found with linen bundles in the ambulance bay.
- Sodexo has published a *Union Avoidance Manual*, which states that the company will use every means to prevent employees from joining unions. The manual urges managers to identify “Communists or other undesirable elements which may be active in the union.”

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