

UPDATE: CAREER MOBILITY AND TRAINING

HEU Care Aides are gaining greater recognition and support for their practice

PROMOTING CARE AIDES' ROLE, training and value within the health care team has been a cornerstone of HEU's advocacy efforts for many years. Now, those efforts are paying off. No longer will care aide training programs suffer from widely differing standards, where graduates come into the practice environment without a common set of skills and abilities.

THE PROBLEM

Currently, there are 16 public and 32 private post-secondary institutions offering the Residential Care Attendant/Community Health Worker program, or its equivalent. And although there's a common standard in the programs offered through the public colleges, that's not the case for private colleges. Not only is there no consistency between the length of programs offered or and the costs involved, but some courses also have almost no practicum time, and some have "no fail" policies.

The result? Some Care Aides graduate without proper training for the job, through no fault of their own. They may have paid \$10,000 or more through a private college, only to discover certain health authorities won't hire them. It's a problem that compromises care delivery in our facilities, and undermines the ability of the health system to recruit and retain enough adequately trained workers.

THE SOLUTION

In 2006 bargaining, HEU secured a commitment from employers and government to develop training standards for Residential Care Attendants (RCAs) and Community Health Workers (CHWs) that would be applied to all educational institutions.

That commitment began a province-wide process where the union, government, employers and educators have worked together, over the better part of three years, to establish basic occupational competencies and standards required for best practice in the field, and to develop a new curriculum that better reflects the realities of today's residential care environment.

As part of its role on the advisory committee to the Care Aide Competency Project, HEU

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HEU has worked with Care Aides and government to establish occupational competencies and a new standardized training curriculum.

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recruited dozens of front-line Care Aides to explain the details of the work they do and the challenges they face delivering care. Of the 200 participants, 50 per cent were experienced RCAs and CHWs.

The project focused on what workers are required to do on the job, and their ability to perform those tasks.

And it provided the basis for a new, provincial training curriculum – approved by the Ministry of Health in 2008 – that will ensure every Care Aide, who graduates from a public or private basic training program, is equipped with the same skills and knowledge base. The curriculum hadn't been updated since 1992.

Recognizing the crucial role Care Aides play in providing quality care, the new curriculum will also equip these workers with important problem-solving and critical-thinking skills needed to provide bedside care to patients with higher acuity levels and more complex health needs.

And to ensure every graduate is practice-ready, it has set a minimum standard of 745 total training hours, including 270 hours of practicum time.

NEXT STEPS

With standards and a new training curriculum in place, the next goal is to create the mechanisms to ensure those standards are met and enforced in all public and private post-secondary institutions.

That work is now underway through the Residential Care Policy Committee, also bargained by the union in 2006. This committee brings together government, employer and union representatives – including HEU Care Aides – along with other stakeholders, to tackle policy issues on a regular basis.

HEU member Georgina Mosely, who works at Glacier View Lodge in Courtenay, has been a Care Aide for 17 years, and sits on the policy committee. She admits that it was a bit intimidating at first to be at a table with employers, government reps, and “so many knowledgeable professionals.” But she says it's been an important opportunity to advocate for Care Aides' roles and practice.

“Everyone at the policy table – whether they are managers or employers – really wants to deal with the issues we face, and get to the core changes we need at a provincial level to make a positive difference on the ground,” she says.

Once the Residential Care Committee has established a monitoring and enforcement mechanism for the new curriculum, it will be making recommendations regarding the conditions required to deliver the best care possible within a quality working environment.

