



Vancouver Coastal temporarily suspends controversial attendance program

Health authority organizing focus groups to evaluate ways to improve initiative, after workers raise concerns in employer survey.

The Vancouver Coastal Health Authority's recent decision to put its Attendance & Wellness Promotion (AWP) program "on hold" is welcome news to all those who have strongly opposed the employer initiative since it was launched a decade ago.

"We're pleased the health authority is finally listening to the concerns of frontline workers," says HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside. "Many of our members feel the program has become an attendance management exercise by the employer to target and punish workers who call in sick. Instead, we encourage Vancouver Coastal to identify and tackle the systemic problems that contribute to high rates of injuries and illness in health care."

In 2013, HEU and other unions successfully filed a grievance to ensure the employer would consider the circumstances of individual cases, and that the program progression was not automatic. HEU continues to fight against members being disciplined for non-culpable absenteeism through overtime bans, FTE reductions and terminations.

Currently, there are many wellness programs already available, such as EDMP, EFAP, workability and accommodations, which can be negatively affected by the AWP.

A recent survey, conducted by the health authority, showed workers overwhelmingly found the controversial program far too punitive, and not focused enough on their health and wellness.

As a result, Vancouver Coastal Health has temporarily suspended the AWP, and has organized focus groups with health union representatives, frontline workers, and other stakeholders to review what's working, what's not, and brainstorm ways to improve the program. HEU will continue to advocate, through this process, for members' right to take sick leave when needed and be able to work in a safe environment.

A series of 90-minute sessions are being held in person or by teleconference this week and next. Participating workers, who registered for a session, will be paid at straight time for attending.

The health authority is not disbanding the AWP. Rather, the program is being redesigned with input from workers directly impacted by it.

If you have questions, please talk to your local shop steward.

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