



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWSLETTER

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CUPE news: Contracting out, hand washing won't break deadly chain of infection

Ottawa, ON – While hand washing is a positive measure in fighting health care-associated infections (HAIs), a new research paper from the Canadian Union of Public Employees says that governments and employers must invest in cleaning and keep services public in order to stop unnecessary suffering and deaths.

“We can demand and audit hand washing all we want, but without a clean environment, hands will quickly become re-contaminated,” says CUPE National President Paul Moist. “The best defence against HAIs is strong cleaning and support services. Yet across Canada, these very services have been cut, and in many provinces, privatized.”

The CUPE backgrounder is the first in the country to document the correlation between HAIs (such as MRSA, VRE and *C. difficile*) and cleaning and support services, overcrowding, and outsourcing.

The research draws from evidence in Canada and abroad, and provides proven solutions for fighting HAIs. Key recommendations include: investment in more cleaning and support staff, training and workforce stability; lower occupancy rates; mandatory cleaning standards, monitoring and public reporting of HAIs; and ending contracting out.

“Scotland and Wales have actually contracted in hospital cleaning in order to reduce spiking infection rates. They’ve learned that contracting out leads to cuts in staff, high turnover, less training and less communication between clinical and support staff,” says Moist.

The report also finds that where governments in Canada and Europe have increased investment in cleaning and infection control, infection rates have gone down.

Health care-associated infections are the fourth leading cause of death in Canada. One in every nine hospital patients contracts an HAI, and 8,500 to 12,000 Canadians die of HAIs every year.

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