



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWSLETTER

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Key questions on supply chain remain unanswered by health employers

Supply chain workers concerned about wage cuts and job security – survey

Health employers and representatives of the new Shared Services Organization for Health Care (SSO) have still not answered key questions about the future of HEU employees who deliver supply chain services.

While the provincial health minister has forecast that supply chain consolidation will result in savings of \$150 million, health employers have not been transparent about how these plans will affect members' jobs and collective agreement.

Hospital Employees' Union representatives met with the SSO and health employers on March 9 hoping for some clarity on these issues, but the stonewalling continued.

Future of the bargaining unit

Of particular concern is whether the SSO will attempt to transfer supply chain workers into another bargaining unit covered by a different collective agreement. On that issue, SSO and employer reps said that they are still "actively researching" the issue.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says the union has demanded a full discussion on this issue before any decisions or actions are taken by the SSO on the issue of bargaining unit designation.

"Health employers and the SSO have created an atmosphere of uncertainty throughout the supply chain because they have not been clear about their plans for members' jobs, wages and collective agreement rights," says Darcy.

"The success of the government's plans for supply chain consolidation depends to a great extent on keeping skilled and experienced workers on board," adds Darcy. "The new SSO's information blackout on their future plans for members' jobs undermines the entire service."

Where will jobs be lost?

The SSO and health employers told the union that the move to "centres of excellence" in the supply chain staffed by specialized teams will not be geographically based but rather will be based on a "virtual" model.

That means members of these teams won't necessarily be working in the same location, but will use improved information technology to coordinate their work from a number of different sites.

Nevertheless, SSO and health employers say that current plans are for a reduction of about 75 full-time equivalent (FTE) positions roughly divided between buyers, clerks and warehousing. They also claim that it is "very likely" that there will be no job losses because of projected retirements.

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But health employers and the SSO did not disclose at what locations the displacements would occur, a situation that Darcy says is contributing to rising anxiety in the workplace.

They also project an increase of seven FTEs in senior buyer and team lead positions. An additional 25 FTEs of “category management” jobs and six FTEs for business analysts are also planned, but the bargaining unit status of these positions is not clear.

Survey of supply chain members reveals that wages and job security are top concerns

As part of its presentation to the SSO and health employers on March 9, HEU presented the results of an online survey of members in the supply chain.

The survey indicates that members are concerned about wages and job security – and they don’t think their employers have been forthcoming about their future plans.

More than 140 members took part in the survey. Here are the main findings:

- 93 per cent of those surveyed say they are very worried (71 per cent) or concerned (22 per cent) about future wage and benefit cuts;
- 87 per cent say that they are very worried (65 per cent) or concerned (22 per cent) about job loss;
- 85 per cent say they are very worried (59 per cent) or concerned (26 per cent) about loss of seniority and bumping rights;
- less than half (45 per cent) of those surveyed thought that management kept workers up-to-date, while about one-quarter got most of their information through word-of-mouth, and 29 per cent said they didn’t really know what was going on;
- about half weren’t sure what consolidation would mean for their jobs in the future, but 31 per cent thought jobs would be eliminated in their workplaces;
- more than half (53 per cent) say that health employers are having trouble recruiting and retaining staff;
- nearly one in five (18 per cent) say they are considering leaving health care because of the uncertainty around supply chain consolidation, while another 40 per cent said they may consider leaving;
- 90 per cent of those surveyed are full-time workers, and
- 45 per cent of those surveyed have worked in the supply chain for more than 10 years (a majority has worked in the area for more than five years).

“Our survey shows that we have an experienced and committed workforce in the supply chain, but they are anxious about the possibility of wage reductions and job loss in the future – and a significant number are considering leaving health care as a result,” says Darcy.

“Health employers and the SSO need to take survey results very seriously or they will seriously undermine the quality of service delivery in the supply chain.”

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