



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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AG's report reveals lack of action by Victoria on infection control commitments

*Lack of coordination in dealing with superbugs compounded
by the contracting out of hospital cleaning services, says union*

The Auditor General's review of infection control in the province's health care system signals an alarming lack of coordination despite a two-year old promise by Victoria to act quickly on this critical patient safety issue, says the Hospital Employees' Union.

And the union says that contracting out of hospital cleaning in our largest urban centres has made matters worse by blurring the lines of accountability for this key element of infection control.

In January, 2005, in response to a number of incidents involving patient infections in the Fraser Health Authority, then health minister Shirley Bond undertook to "take a coordinated approach to transferring successful processes province-wide."

But the AG's report concludes that the Ministry of Health failed to implement effective or integrated systems for the prevention, surveillance and control of infection. And health authorities haven't put comprehensive programs in place to ensure best practices in infection control.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says the conclusions reached by the AG are just the tip of the iceberg.

"Government efforts to cut costs in hospital cleaning by privatizing services have seriously compromised our infection control efforts and the safety of patients and health care workers.

"In our largest urban hospitals, nursing staff must call off-site corporate call centres to request cleaning services. Training of cleaning staff is inadequate. And low wages for cleaners have resulted in high staff turnover and crushing workloads."

In addition, Darcy says that some health authorities and their corporate cleaning contractors continue to resist a coordinated approach to dealing with workers' concerns around infection control and other health and safety issues.

"The Auditor General is calling for a more coordinated approach to infection control," says Darcy. "A good start would be hospital-wide health and safety committees that include corporate cleaning contractors and their employees -- instead of the fragmented approach currently in place."

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