

**Workers plead case at council**

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Lack of cleaning supplies and the deterioration of wages and working conditions are major problems for health-care support workers, Burnaby city council was told Monday.

The Hospital Employees' Union came to council seeking support for their living wage campaign, a demand for the provincial government to increase wages and improve working conditions for health-care support workers - people who are on the frontline in maintaining clean hospitals and health-care facilities.

Union representative Jenifer Whiteside and local residents Juvelita Dacpano and Paula Mann spoke to council, with Dacpano and Mann telling their stories.

"The working condition is not fine," Mann said, who has worked at Lions Gate Hospital for four years. "There is never enough supply to do the job properly."

Lack of cleaning supplies mean infection control and cleanliness is deteriorating in all hospitals, Whiteside explained.

"We hear from lots of members that there is not enough gloves, masks, (cleaning products)," Whiteside said. "It's happening in all hospitals, including Burnaby General and Royal Columbian."

Dacpano spoke about her difficulties in trying to live on low wages in one of the most expensive cities in Canada. She has worked at UBC Hospital for almost five years.

"We try to do a quality service to people we see every day," she explained. "We have made friends with the residents. I love what I do, but I don't make enough money to support myself and four children.

"There is high turnover, and that affects the quality of service. Workers come and go because they find better-paying jobs."

The Liberals contracted out the cleaning and dietary staff positions in 2002. That resulted in wages being slashed by \$10 per hour to the present \$13. Benefits were also cut, and the present contract expires Sept. 30.

Council was unanimously sympathetic to the delegation and has referred the matter to the social issues committee, which could draft up a letter in support.

Coun. Nick Volkow said he has a personal reason to support the union's efforts.

"When my family first came to this country, my mother worked in laundry at St. Paul's (Hospital in Vancouver)," Volkow said. "A close family member experienced this legislative theft ... in 2003."

"Nobody in (Metro) Vancouver can afford a home on that wage, let alone rent," said Coun. Pietro Calendino. "Nobody can make a living on \$13 an hour."

The Hospital Employees' Union is also engaged in figuring out what is a living wage for people in Vancouver, using figures from Statistics Canada. Such a wage takes into account what is needed for a worker and family to live a healthy standard of living, instead of the bare minimum. A living wage in Victoria was calculated to be \$16.49 an hour.

A report presented by the union says the three multinational companies employing hospital cleaners and dietary workers are pulling in billions of dollars.

London based Compass group has a five-year contract on Vancouver Island and reported \$1 billion in profits in 2007. The CEO pocked \$4.5 million in salary and benefits.

Paris-based Sodexo holds a 10-year food services contract with the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority and a five-year cleaning contract with the Fraser Health Authority.

The company made \$551 million in profits and paid its CEO \$3.5 million in 2007.

Philadelphia-based Aramark has a five-year contract to provide cleaning services for Vancouver Coastal Health Authority. Its profits were \$265 million, and the CEO netted \$8.3 million in wage and benefits last year.

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