



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Health care workers under pressure to come to work sick – poll

Polling released today by the Hospital Employees' Union shows one out of three health care workers (33.6 per cent) report coming to work while experiencing cold or flu symptoms because of pressure from their boss not to access sick days.

The poll raises serious questions about the government's recent measures to combat the spread of influenza in B.C.'s health facilities.

Last month, government announced it would require health care workers to wear surgical masks for the entire flu season if they do not receive the annual flu vaccine.

The government release also notes that health employers are taking other measures to prevent the spread of influenza to vulnerable populations including "asking staff to stay home when ill."

But that approach, says HEU secretary-business manager Bonnie Pearson, is at odds with the actions of a number of health authorities, which have put "attendance management" programs in place that penalize sick workers for accessing sick leave.

"B.C.'s health employers are using increasingly coercive methods to reduce the use of sick leave with predictable consequences," says Pearson. "And those practices contradict other public health initiatives intended to reduce the spread of the flu virus."

Health authorities' attendance management programs penalize workers who are deemed to have above-average sick time usage through a range of measures such as denying access to overtime hours, reducing their hours of work, and threatening them with dismissal.

HEU is grieving the practice at an arbitration hearing in October on behalf of the multi-union Facilities Bargaining Association. The outcome will have industry-wide application.

"Employers can't have it both ways. The first line of defense in reducing the spread of influenza in health facilities needs to be encouraging workers to stay home when they are sick – not punishing them for accessing sick leave."

The telephone poll conducted by Viewpoints Research Ltd. sampled 800 HEU members employed in B.C.'s publicly-funded hospitals, residential care facilities and other health care sites across the province. The poll was in the field from August 13-22.

The poll is accurate to within 3.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

The question: Have you ever reported to work, even though you were sick with a cold or the flu, because of pressure from your employer not to access your sick days?

Yes - 33.6% No - 63.6% Don't Know/Refused - 2.8%

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