



# WorkSafe BC must order VIHA to provide safe workplaces in aftermath of violent assaults against psychiatric nurses

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(VANCOUVER) - Reid Johnson, President of the Health Sciences Association, and Debra McPherson, President of the BC Nurses Union, are calling on WorkSafe BC to immediately order VIHA to protect staff at Eric Martin Pavilion, the mental health facility at Royal Jubilee Hospital in Victoria.

The demand for action follows a series of violent assaults on staff by a patient with severe mental illness. VIHA's cuts to psychiatric services and their inaction on improving hospital safety leave patients, staff and the wider community vulnerable to violence.

In August 2009, a psychiatric patient at the Eric Martin Pavilion assaulted a registered psychiatric nurse so severely that she is still unable to work. Since then other nurses have been assaulted by the same patient. After another violent incident in March 2010 the patient was removed from the Eric Martin Pavilion and transferred to a corrections facility where a corrections officer was assaulted.

-Unstable psychiatric patients are often unable to restrain their violent behaviour," says Johnson. -Hospital security and safety is something VIHA must provide when patients are known to be violent and unstable. I hope that no one dies before VIHA acts on their responsibility."

Following these events WorksafeBC issued orders compelling VIHA to protect workers from violence in the workplace. WorksafeBC is also reportedly reviewing the imposition of a substantial monetary fine against VIHA for failure to provide a safe workplace.

-This situation is symptomatic of wider problems with VIHA's inability to provide safe and effective treatment environments for unstable patients," says McPherson. -VIHA has also dropped the ball on meeting their legal requirements to provide safe workplaces for employees and failed to comply with WorkSafe BC orders."

HSABC and BCNU are demanding that VIHA immediately comply with all legal requirements of WorksafeBC. That includes conducting regular risk assessments, improving hospital intake protocols to ensure that care can be provided safely, informing health care workers when patients have a history of violent behaviour, and increasing security support.

In addition, HSABC and BCNU call on the Ministry of Health Services to investigate the risk to staff and patients at VIHA facilities, and work with the Attorney General and other ministries to ensure appropriate facilities exist to treat patients with a high risk of violence.

HSABC and BCNU are the unions representing Registered Psychiatric Nurses and Registered Nurses at the Eric Martin Pavilion of Victoria's Royal Jubilee Hospital.

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