

BULLETIN

## Unpaid overtime hurts in the long run

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by RON OHMART



**ou can't get something for nothing.** It's a common cliché. We've all heard it. Most of us have said it. But in the caring professions, there are few who live it.

Over the past several months, as funding sources are attacked and contract rights are tested more and more by employers looking to meet a bottom line imposed by the government, the pressures at work are on the increase. There are fewer staff doing the same or an increased workload. Contract rights health care workers fought for decades to win have been taken away.

Members put in that extra 15 or 20 minutes a day, just to finish up a job or because they are with a family member who needs their support. You can't just walk out on a family meeting, or leave a patient's bedside because the clock says your time is up. So you stay 5, 10 or 20 minutes through your scheduled breaks, or past your shift end. And you don't put in for the overtime you worked.

Working that unreported 15-20 minutes a day adds up to more than a week a year of donated time. That's time you donate to your employer without ever getting compensated for it.

And in the long run, it's not helping anyone working in the health care system. Because of shortages in your department, you may stay a few extra minutes. The work gets done. Employers don't acknowledge that you're missing your breaks and staying late or coming in early to keep up with the workload. They look at the department, see the work is being done, and pronounce that the FTE allocation is appropriate. In the meantime they are eliminating Earned Days Off (EDO) schedules, failing to provide proper on call and call back pay, not to mention the continued reduction of the workforce.

Why should you give that to an employer who is working in overdrive to meet the government's unrealistic goals at your expense?

HSA has been incredibly active in the past two years addressing grievances on behalf of members who have been poorly treated by their employers. There has been a steady stream of trips to the Labour Relations Board to challenge employers' interpretations of the contract and the government's legislation.

HSA has been successful in many of those trips to the Labour Relations Board. The successes have been chronicled in *The Report* throughout the year. But still employers persist in pushing the envelope, and relying on the good will of the people delivering services to achieve imposed financial targets. The sad reality is, thanks to the government's insistence on a strictly economic approach to health care, delivery of consistent and quality care is increasingly becoming a personal responsibility for the people who provide the care.

With all the pressure the government and employers put on dedicated health professionals every day, there is

less and less good will among those health care providers. As much as you are dedicated to your professions and your vital contribution to the health care system, there is only so far you can be pushed.

Unpaid overtime is subsidizing our health care system. Your employer is counting on your professional commitment to the work you do to allow the system to continue to function.

We need to send a strong message to all employers that the health care system works because of the contributions each and every member of the health care team makes. Those contributions must be valued. Every time you work through your lunch or other scheduled break without being compensated, you are devaluing the contribution you make to our health care system.

The first step to making employers aware of the personal contributions HSA members make every day in the workplace is to publicize the extra time you work to get the job done.

In some facilities, members track their overtime contributions as a tool to let the employer know that without those extra 15 minutes here and there the work won't get done. In many cases, departments don't have an overtime budget. Every minute of overtime worked is a donation to the employer. Continue making those donations anonymously, and the employer will never know how short-staffed your department is. Track the overtime worked, and you make a compelling case for additional staff. Members continually complain of the increasing workload, yet often when the union goes to investigate there are no records of a problem existing. We need facts to win grievances, and overtime records are the best possible facts available.

Our health care system has always depended on the people delivering the care to work. You are an important member of the team. It's time you made sure your employer knows exactly what contributions you make. 

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