

BULLETIN

WorkSafeBC orders Vancouver Island Health Authority to protect employees

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IN AUGUST OF 2009, a violent patient at Eric Martin Pavillion punched a psychiatric nurse. Then he kicked her. Then he beat her head repeatedly against the hard floor. The nurse was so severely injured she may never work again.

After another violent incident just a few months later, in March, the patient was removed from the Eric Martin Pavilion and transferred to a corrections facility ... where he then assaulted a corrections officer.

Early in 2010, HSA called on WorkSafeBC to take action.

-Unstable psychiatric patients are often unable to restrain their violent behaviour," said HSA President Reid Johnson, who has experience working psychiatric wards as a social worker. -Hospital management has to take responsibility for the safety of the staff as well as the patient."

After a thorough inspection, WorkSafeBC issued orders compelling Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) to protect employees from violence in the workplace. A total of nine separate orders affect two Victoria-area mental health facilities and amount to a sharp condemnation of VIHAs failure to protect the safety of staff.

-This is a staggering number of WorkSafeBC orders issued against one employer," said Johnson. HSA is demanding the VIHA immediately comply with all legal requirements.

-The includes regular risk assessments," Johnson added. -It also means improving hospital intake protocols to ensure that care can be provided safely. We have also been calling on VIHA to increase security support,

-With proper safety precautions and systems in place, incidents like these are preventable. when patients are known to be violent and unstable, VIHA must make sure health workers are informed of past violent behaviour, and the potential for more. Hospital security and safety is a serious issue. I hope no one dies before VIHA acts on their responsibility."

In recent years, WorkSafeBC has fined VIHA a total of \$225,000 for failure to take measures to prevent violence at Nanaimo Regional, West Coast General and Campbell River Hospitals.

-For the first set of violations at Nanaimo General and West Coast General, VIHA was fined \$75,000," Johnson said. -For the second set ... at Campbell River ... the fine doubled because the violations were so similar."

WorkSafeBC has said the fines related to the violations at Eric Martin Pavilion and Adanac will be even more severe.

-Is this where our precious health care dollars should be going? Fines because of safety violations?" asked Johnson.

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