

BULLETIN

"I was bullied by BCNU"

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"It got so bad I started to think about moving. I thought, If this is the way they were behaving towards me now, what were they going to be like if they were my union and I depended on them to represent me?"

Jenny Orriss is calm and articulate when she tells the story, but you can sense her frustration, her anxiety. More than anything, you sense her strength.

Orriss, a registered psychiatric nurse at Royal Inland Hospital in Kamloops, takes her professional commitment to her patients and her colleagues seriously, and is mostly startled by the dangerous tactics employed by BC Nurses' Union organizers who tried to raid HSA members last fall.

"I mean if they think this is ok, it really makes you wonder how they run their union," she says. They put their own registered nurses at risk by sending these people in to disrupt the workplace.

"I think that after the labour board ruling they know there are a lot of nurses who are aware of their tactics, and they probably won't try that again at our worksite," said Orriss, referring to rulings by the Labour Relations Board on April 17 and May 13 which found the BCNU had put both patients and staff at risk by using dangerous organizing tactics at Royal Inland Hospital in December 2014. "But I know they will try it at other worksites, so it's important that all RPNs know about this. They need to be prepared, and they need to stand up. Because they don't have to put up with bullying."

Orriss was a fairly new RPN the first year raid organizers showed up at the work site. Her colleagues encouraged her to become a steward, and while she was at the training session organizers from the Union of Psychiatric Nurses, which has since been taken over by BCNU, showed up and invited HSA members out for dinner.

"HSA said it would be good for us to hear both sides, so I went to the dinner, but I wound up leaving because the UPN was being so aggressive. Some of our members were asking really intelligent questions, but their response was just rude. All they did was slander HSA. They didn't say how they would represent us better."

The next year, things began to ramp up. BCNU organizers showed up one night, after hours, They convinced some nurses to let them into the site, and they insisted on talking to Orriss. She gave them some time, but when she told them she needed to get back to work they became confrontational, and said that HSA members were being rude to them.

Orriss notified her manager about the incident, and not long after they showed up again. This time, they interacted with patients and attempted to disrupt a meeting of HSA RPNs.

"The charge nurse asked them to leave and they refused. She notified the manager on call and he informed them they needed to leave and they still refused. They didn't leave until they were escorted off the unit by security."

During the incident, BCNU organizers confronted Orriss, calling her a liar in front of her patients. Orriss was appalled. "Our job is to help our patients, and we work very hard to build therapeutic relationships with them in an environment of trust. And then these strangers come in and make accusations about me right in front of them. Obviously this is very disconcerting for the people we are caring for."

The disruptive tactics continued. One evening BCNU organizers confronted HSA RPNs while they were meeting at a restaurant, making a scene in front of the public. "It was really confrontational and inappropriate to do that in a public setting. It did not cast our profession in a positive light. It got to the point where we had to move tables."

They continued to enter the workplace after hours, acting aggressively and confronting RPNs while working. Then they started to harass her.

"They were clearly violating labour laws, as the labour board ruling showed, and after I asked them to leave they began to harass me. I was targeted by them."

"They started to make derogatory comments about me to the other nurses. It got to the point where I started to feel quite anxious about coming to work. I mean I'm dealing with people who come into my workplace and call me a liar, right to my face, in front of patients and other nurses. That's when I started to think about moving away."

The end of the formal raiding period brought some relief, but Orriss knows they'll be back, and it's important to get ready.

"It's important to let new grads know that RPNs helped found HSA, that HSA has fought for RPNs, has the lowest dues and really experienced labour relations staff. That we've really led on the issue of violence with things like Val Avery's summit with the government and key agencies. And it's important to remind them that HSA has remained a professional union - we don't raid, we don't engage in unprofessional and dangerous tactics like the BCNU, and we don't break labour laws like BCNU."

Orriss also expresses gratitude for the support RPNs have been receiving. "We realize there are many other professions in HSA and I know there are probably some hard feelings because of the resources needed to help us, but everyone has been really supportive. That's one of the strengths of HSA - we are made up of so many professions, but that allows us to speak to the broader issues in health care, like the risks to the public system that we all work in."

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