

December 12, 2014

Honourable Terry Lake
Minister of Health
Room 337, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Via fax: 250.356.9587

Dear Minister Lake:

As you are aware, violent assaults on health care workers in Penticton and Kamloops have dominated the news this past week. Incidents like these have become all too common.

The Health Sciences Association of BC, representing 17,000 professionals in health care and social services settings, urges you to take action to stop the violence by convening a Violence in Health Care Summit involving key health sector stakeholders.

HSA members know full well the difficulties involved in providing care for patients or clients while also having to manage their own personal safety. There is always a professional desire and expectation to provide the highest standard of care possible, but this is becoming increasingly difficult due to inadequate protections against violence and aggression.

Far too many HSA members and other health care workers have become victims of violence. They are physically and verbally attacked in residential facilities, in hospitals, including emergency rooms and in psychiatric units, and in clients' homes. The death in 2005 of David Bland, an HSA vocational rehabilitation counselor in Richmond, at the hands of a former patient is still on the minds of many of our members.

Many of the gaps in safety protocols that gave rise to that tragic incident still exist today.

The fact that incidents of violence and aggression are increasing and that each year hundreds of non-compliance orders are written by WorkSafeBC inspectors against health sector employers show that there are major deficiencies in how violence is handled in health care settings.

We are concerned about a lack of consistency in violence prevention practices and training around the province. Our experience is that health sector employers seem resistant to move to a standardized provincial approach. There are different practices and opinions about very basic protective measures, such as on the best types of alert systems to use, while some employers choose not to provide alert systems at all. Hundreds of clients with histories of aggression do not have behavioural care plans in place and there are major communication failures between agencies that provide care for the same patients. There are differing viewpoints on how and when security guards should be involved in protecting or supporting health care workers. In addition, many incidents go unreported or are reported and not followed up on.

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While many health care workers have received valuable violence prevention training, more importantly, thousands more who need the training have not received it and have trouble accessing it. Many BC health employers are not even keeping track of who is receiving violence prevention training.

In 2013, WorkSafeBC accepted 879 claims from workers in the health and social services sectors who were injured on the job after physical assaults by patients, clients, and others. Those numbers don't include claims related to verbal and psychological abuse or cases of post-traumatic stress experienced by workers who are called upon daily to intervene during violent events. There are estimates that as many as half of the incidents related to violence and aggression from patients and clients are not reported at all.

There are measures that can be taken, if there is a will. Our proposal for a summit includes a call to conduct a speedy and thorough examination of what is needed to better protect health care workers in this province, and a commitment from the Ministry of Health to ensure the necessary financial resources are in place for this critical work to prevent more victims of violence in our health care system.

Some of the measures to be taken include:

- the adoption of best practices for dealing with workplace violence and aggression;
- evaluation of staffing levels and staff mix;
- implementation of a province-wide alert notification system;
- standardized violence prevention protocols across the province;
- better coordination, delivery and tracking of violence prevention training;
- stricter requirements and clear procedures for reporting all incidents of violence and aggression;
- stronger monitoring and enforcement powers for WorkSafeBC.

I ask you to convene a Violence in Health Care Summit at the earliest opportunity and that this summit include representatives of:

- Ministry of Health
- WorkSafeBC
- Health sector employers
- Health sector unions
- Physicians
- Police services

Sincerely,



Val Avery, President
HEALTH SCIENCES ASSOCIATION OF BC

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cc: Stephen Brown, Deputy Minister of Health
Fax: 250.952.1909