

SH Fall 2007 OH&S Report

I attended a workplace health, safety and wellness conference in Kelowna. This conference was put on by the BC Health Authorities. The title was quite daunting: “Innovation, Research, and Practice in Healthcare. Beyond Compliance to Competitive Necessity.” Competitive necessity is a phrase that struck home with me. It appears to me that the health authorities are starting to look at staff health and thereby staff retention seriously. The purpose of this convention was to provide information to enhance the health, safety and well-being of the healthcare work force. There were BCNU union stewards from across the province along with several people from health authority corporate offices. I saw people from our own C&W HR health promotions department which was exciting; hopefully they got some good ideas to incorporate into the organization to help with staff retention.

I was very heartened and motivated by this blind mountaineer who told us that “Hope is useless without action”. This is true in our personal lives and especially true at work. We can hope for a better, safer, healthier workplace but nothing will change without action. That is in part why many of us are here at union meetings. I became active in the BCNU because I wanted to do something to improve the place I work; the place I spend a lot of my waking hours. I also want to work at a hospital that I am proud of. A safe and healthy environment, where I feel valued, and a place that provides great patient care. This is my hope and what I strive for.

I’m really excited about one of the joint (union/management) committees that I’m on. It’s the Mental Health Working Group. We just had a survey completed to gauge the wellness of the PHSA employees. There was a good turnout of about 50%--which is quite remarkable. The results when finalized will be made available and already the committee has some very preliminary results to work with. The committee is currently working on addressing depression at the worksite with various tools that will be brought to the PHSA employees. We are looking at various formats (intranet, paper, face to face, etc) to meet the needs more easily. There are some initiatives in the works right now. Soon there will be a confidential mental health self assessment tool available online called “feeling better

now”. We have available at the steward office and HR dept a self help anti-depression workbook, called “Anti-depressant skills at work: dealing with mood problems in the workplace”. We are currently working with the Canadian Mental Health Association in implementing a workshop called “mental health first aid”. If the committee finds this workshop of value we will be presenting it to the managers first and then have it available to the rest of the organization. So keep your eyes open. These tools can be of value to us, our families and our coworkers.

A few of the other safety projects at C&W are the SENS (safety engineered needle system). This has just been introduced into children’s hospital with poor inservices available to staff. We will wait and see if needle stick injuries will be decreased and what if any evaluations will be done. Next year PHSA will have to implement SEDS (safety engineered devices) which will include ALL sharps. I foresee this to be a very daunting task for all health authorities. The province is getting these orders from WorkSafeBC (formally WCB). Hover mats have been brought into the OR to help reduce or eliminate muscular-skeletal injuries when transferring patients. We are hoping to get some more of these mats throughout the hospital if they proof to be effective.

Risk assessments continue in all areas of the hospital. The mental health program got a surprise inspection from WorkSafeBC this summer to review their violence risk prevention procedures. They did extremely well! However recently there has been an increase in violence from patients in the inpatient mental health program. These incidents are being dealt with by use of incident reports and PRFs.

Looking forward to seeing you at the next regional meeting.

Diane Hystad