

April 6, 2024

St. Paul's Emergency Department

Mr. Everett Hindley

**Saskatchewan Health Minister**

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To All the Recipients of This Letter;

We hope that this letter finds you promptly. We have collaborated together multiple times with our concerns about the state of our emergency department and today we bring forward one of the most demoralizing matters in question. Without further ado;

Over the past 3 years we have endured unrelenting change in our workplace. Many changes are beneficial, necessary and acceptable. Many of these changes have made us stronger as a unit and safer in our workplace. There are also changes however, that have worked against us. They have left us feeling that we are not valued. That our contribution to our Emergency Department is insignificant. We are told frequently that we are important and that our loyalty and commitment is recognized and appreciated. These words would be more meaningful if we observed actions being taken to demonstrate recognition and appreciation.

One of the biggest changes that we have experienced in the past three years is the hiring of agency nurses. To the unit staff who have shown commitment to the emergency department, the agency nurses appear valued while they themselves are not. Unfortunately, monetary compensation in today's world implies worth and the agency nurses discuss their wages which range from ninety to one hundred and thirty dollars per hour nearly triple the hourly wage of the home based nurse. Beyond the difference in wage, as we scrape our windows in 40 below weather and shiver as we warm our vehicles, the agency nurse is picked up in a toasty warm Uber and dropped at a residence that has been provided for them to have a meal that they are compensated for.

This significant disparity in perceived value leaves the permanent staff feeling frustrated. There is an undeniable sense of resentment towards the concept of agency nursing. The nursing staff are told that they are to be grateful for the help but at the same time benefits that were held prior to the over use of agency nurses are being taken away. Home unit staff are reporting that it is difficult to pick up to full time hours as casual and part time employees. Fourth weekend premium is becoming more difficult to obtain as the agency nurses are primarily scheduled to fill weekend shifts and are then available to pick up overtime during the week. Many nurses rely on premium pay to address the needs and wants of themselves and their families. These nurses choose not to pursue agency nursing because of the ability to access additional pay through overtime and fourth weekend premiums.

The Number of agency nurses employed by the department is steadily increasing and although we have had those who fit in well, several do not have the skills that are necessary to work in an emergency department. They are unfamiliar with the facility and receive minimal orientation as they are expected to be knowledgeable and experienced as well as adaptable to new environments. Home staff are then required to pick up the slack when working alongside a nurse with a minimal skill set increasing their own workload. The burden of the agency nurses' short comings falls on the charge nurse and the bedside partner nurses. There are concerns related to patient safety. We have casual RNs that feel pushed out of our unit. They have been in our unit for many years and are competent, trustworthy and experienced. Safe staffing levels does not just mean the number of bodies scheduled per shift.

Booking shifts in advance should still be a home based nurse's prerogative. If it is short notice and there are no home based applicants then management should make priority calls. Regular and straight time nurses should not be denied shifts because there are agency nurses pre-booked for those shifts. Agency nurses are guaranteed 14 pre-booked shifts as their baseline and full time home based nurses are scheduled for 12. Agency nurses have come with pre-booked overtime shifts while home based nurses must apply and can be denied. Home based nurses are frequently forced to pick up overtime on other units and watch as agency nurses work in theirs.

When we can find ways to attract agency nurses and keep them coming back, why can we not find ways to retain our own nurses? As tax payers we are concerned when we hear that several million dollars will be spent on agency nurses this year to do the job that we do. Agency nurses pay tax to their province of residence. All the dollars earned leave our province. The taxable return is negligible. Saskatchewan nurses pay tax to Saskatchewan. They add to the growth of Saskatchewan. They invest in their province of residence. They have a sense of commitment to the unit and to one another.

The Emergency department is a very unique unit. The patient population ranges from newborn to greater than 100 years old. Care is provided to patients presenting with skinned knees to cardiac arrest. The doors are never closed. We are never "full". We provide food and shelter to the homeless and care for the palliative patient. We see surgical, medical, orthopedic and maternity patients. The number of aggressive patients who may threaten our safety is steadily growing. In a matter of minutes the unit can go from calm to chaos. We often stand alone as a unit, as we stand together as nurses, providing care. We need to keep our home based nurses from leaving. We cannot function safely without them. We are in crisis. Please listen to our voices. We anticipate a swift response and hope our concerns will have bearing on those who read this.

Well supported regards,

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