



March 10, 2017

Tim Manning
Board Chair
Provincial Health Services Authority
700-1380 Burrard St
Vancouver, BC V6Z 2H3

Dear Mr. Manning

Re Forensic Psychiatric Hospital

The BC Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU) represents over 250 members who work at the Forensic Psychiatric Hospital, including health care workers, forensic security officers, dietary staff, social workers, and administrative staff.

Our members at the hospital work with extremely violent patients, and regularly face dangerous and sometimes life-threatening situations. Over the past five years, 102 Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) inspection reports have been filed and 54 WCB orders have been written. The number of these reports has steadily increased each year. In fact, there were so many outstanding orders not reaching compliance that, in September 2016, WCB issued a \$171,000 fine because the employer was not demonstrating due diligence in protecting workers' health and safety.

One example of the type of incidents that workers at the hospital face took place this past September, when a physically abusive patient with a history of violence towards staff began threatening workers in one of the wards. The nurse in charge ordered a Code White to restrain the patient. The incident occurred in a maximum-security ward, but no cameras documented the assault. One worker was struck in the head and received significant injuries. In response, management led an investigation that included multiple interviews of the workers involved. Many interviews were conducted by the workers' direct manager, who is responsible for providing training. We feel this was a severe conflict of interest.

To our disappointment, but not to our surprise, the managers found that they had no culpability in the situation and subsequently suspended almost all of the workers involved. Some of the discipline was extremely severe, with two suspensions over 10-days being issued to Forensic Security Officers, who are Special Provincial Constables under the Police Act. For context, the code of conduct in the regulations state that the maximum allowed under a complaint through the Police Act that governs their positions is five days. Not only do these workers regularly face levels of violence that are equivalent of those of law enforcement officers, they are only given a small fraction of the training. The union feels strongly that



more investment in and oversight of this facility is what is needed, not punishment of workers who put their health and safety on the line on a daily basis.

It is disconcerting that workers were disciplined after responding to a Code White alarm. On the ground, this will have the effect of discouraging workers from future responses which will result in increased risk of injury to workers and patients alike. The Forensic Psychiatric Hospital is statistically one of the most violent workplaces in the province, and management has failed to take adequate steps to help reduce this violence. Aggression and physical violence at this facility has become normalized, and workers are not provided specialized training or resources to deal with acute patients with extremely violent histories.

Our members have the right to go home to their families at the end of their work shifts, free from physical or psychological harm. We will continue to support our members with information and occupational health and safety (OHS) education and training, and encourage them to learn the process for refusing unsafe work and when to use it. Our members must not face discrimination for exercising their health and safety rights.

We urge you to direct your immediate attention to the situation at the forensic hospital. The OHS culture and system at this facility is damaged and in need of repair. A preventative view to reducing the hazards at this worksite must be implemented rather than reactively responding to incidents.

I would like to request a meeting with you to discuss this matter in greater detail. Please do not hesitate to connect with my assistant, Brian Gardiner at brian.gardiner@bcgeu.ca or 604-291-9611. In the meantime, I look forward to personally visiting the worksite the afternoon of March 21 to hear directly from our members.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Smith
President

HR/Im
MoveUP

cc: Carl Roy, President & Chief Executive Officer, PHSA