

# Employers and government agree to measure and address nurses' workloads

Process includes steps to take immediate action at sites with pressing workload problems. BCNU will be involved at all levels

A major breakthrough was achieved in negotiations when the provincial government and health authorities made a commitment to measure and address nurses' workload. A memorandum of agreement (MOA) was signed which acknowledges that patient safety and positive patient outcomes are dependent upon having appropriate staffing plans which provide reasonable workloads for nurses.

The MOA provides a process for resolving excessive workloads. A critical element is the inclusion of a set of objectives to guide the assessment of, and response to, workload issues. These include:

- staffing level to be aligned with the mix of patients
- Appropriate relief allocated to account for vacancies due to vacation, union leave, leave of absence etc
- Appropriate surge capacity to deal with changes in patient load and acuity over the course of time
- Accessible, empowered, skilled frontline leadership
- Other key resources, including such things as equipment and clerical support, may need to be made available.

### STEPS IN THE PROCESS

As this is a major project, involving acute, residential and community care, it contains a number of phased steps and will require careful coordination. To ensure this happens, the following is contained in the MOA:

**Provincial Nursing Workload Committee (PNWC)** [meets within 30 days of ratification] - a joint Nurses' Bargaining Association (NBA), Health Authority, Ministry of Health committee, chaired by the Chief Nurse Executive, with BCNU president as Vice-chair, which will:

- Investigate and determine appropriate workload measurement tools
- Recruit nurse academics/researchers for development and evaluation
- Select initial areas to implement workload measurement

tools and nurse staffing plans (minimum of 2 areas, sites or locations for each sector: acute care, residential care, community and mental health).

- Develop a timeline and target goals.

### Local Nursing Workload Committees (LNWC)

These are joint NBA, Health Authority (including Chief Nursing Officer) committees in each health authority which will:

- Advise Health Authority management and PNWC on implementation and tracking of workload measurement indicators and staffing plan processes
- Develop specific strategies and interventions to address workload in key areas or units identified as needing immediate action.

### Immediate Response

In recognition of work sites that need immediate action to tackle workload, one of the first tasks of the PNWC will be to review all outstanding Professional Responsibility Forms (PRFs) related to workload and make recommendations for resolution. The LNWC will act upon this information but also may identify other areas or units of concern needing intervention.

### Strategic Workload Analysis Team (SWAT)

Each Health Authority will develop a SWAT (joint NBA, Health Authority) which will be sent to areas/units with pressing workload concerns to develop recommendations and strategies that will have an immediate positive impact on workload.

### Resolution

Any unresolved workload concerns will be addressed through the PNWC. This committee will have direct access to the provincial Leadership Council, comprised of the six health authority CEOs, and senior Ministry of Health officials, including the Deputy Minister, Dr Penny Ballem. □