

Nurses' Campaign key to success in restoring nursing hours

A strong campaign led by nurses was key to securing a negotiated settlement for Nanaimo Regional General Hospital (NRGH) which restored nursing hours at the bedside. The agreement, when fully implemented, will restore the majority of the 48,000 annual nursing hours cut by “CDMR” (Care Delivery Model Redesign) back in September 2013.

The campaign pressured Island Health to reverse their cuts to nursing care at the bedside. Island nurses fought hard against the CDMR care model which endangers patients by replacing licensed nurses with unlicensed personnel, leaving nurses with too many patients to care for safely.

Nurses held marches and rallied, wrote letters to the editor and asked important questions on behalf of their patients at every Island Health Board meeting, in order to keep pressure on the employer for nearly two years.

By collecting over 30,000 signatures on a petition demanding Island Health agree to an independent expert review of CDMR's safety impacts, nurses showed widespread public support for the idea that care model changes must be based on evidence of safety and not just as a way to cut costs.

Nurses also documented their professional concerns about the impact of the care model on patient care by filing Professional Responsibility Forms (PRFs). The BCNU filed a Single Employer Policy Dispute grievance against CDMR which made its way to arbitration. Through the arbitration BCNU could release documents about the serious lapses in safety by putting numerous nurses' PRFs on the record – something the employer was clearly anxious to avoid.

The restoration of nursing hours at NRGH is a significant win against irresponsible care model change however four other hospitals on Vancouver Island continue to work under versions of CDMR. BCNU is actively working to restore safe staffing for patients at all of these hospitals.