

December 24th, 2021

As the year comes to a close, it's hard not to look back on the challenges the hospital and the healthcare sector at large have managed to overcome. Today the Province experienced the highest daily case count since the pandemic began, which is a stark reminder that those challenges are far from over. If we've learned anything from the pandemic, it's the need to adapt to the situation and work with the cards were dealt.

At nearly ten thousand positive Covid-19 cases today, it's clear that the risk to the hospital due to collapse of human capital is high. We are asking Senior Management to take decisive action to immediately reduce the staffing pressure in the hospital by considering the following measures.

1) Financial Incentive for accepting Overtime:

Develop an additional premium for voluntarily accepting overtime. This could also include suspending the requirement to "work hours" before qualifying for 1.5x premium for non-culpable absences such as vacation, bereavement, isolation, etc. This will encourage staff to accept OT immediately.

2) Non-Monetary Bonuses for staff accepting OT.

We encourage the employer to examine options to reward staff working extra hours to help sustain hospital operations. This may include levels of rewards as an incentive, such as Bay Café Vouchers for smaller commitments, to a refund of annual parking fees for higher levels and additional time off by offering a "wellness day" for those who are contributing significant time.

3) Encourage Commitment from Part Time staff:

Throughout the pandemic, we've heard countless times that there is a challenge getting part time staff to consent to working more than 24 hours per week. In some areas, we've been told as few as 30% of part time staff consent to additional hours. Despite this, we know many are working full time hours plus overtime. We recognize that this creates challenges for prescheduling and leaves the employer with schedules with holes, thus promoting the use of agency staff and creating a last-minute staffing model. We recommend the hospital institute a financial bonus for part time staff who are willing to irrevocably consent to being scheduled up to full time hours for a period of time (6 months to 1 year). The bonus would be paid upon completion of the term. This allows the employer to have advanced

availability and reduce schedule holes and reduce the use of agency staff. This will contribute towards stable and sustainable staffing and reduce the need to order staff, lock up units and cancel patient programming.

4) Long Term Overtime Pre-Booking:

We have recognized the contributions of agency staff, and although we reject the notion of outside contractors performing bargaining unit work, they have played a role in helping the hospital and our members get through the pandemic. OPSEU disagrees however, that agency staff are a long-term solution. The Union proposes that prior to agency staff being hired for known vacancies, Unit Managers post the existing vacancies and canvas their staff to voluntarily accept the shift as overtime in a fair and equitable manner. The Union's position is that those hours should be offered to OPSEU staff prior to being contracted out. This reduces the need to hire and train agency staff which will result in savings to the employer. In 2016, the Ontario Auditor General released a report citing the cost of hiring an agency RPN is 52% higher than that of hospital staff. That cost was inclusive of pension and benefits. Even at 1.5x, it's clear that offering these shifts to Hospital employees first is more cost effective and promotes optimal patient care by having regular staff who are trained performing the work.

5) Prioritize filling vacancies:

As of November 3rd, 2021, the employer stated that there were currently 158 vacancies. Notably, this occurred prior to the termination of 25 staff related to the vaccination policy. What is also noteworthy is that despite the 158 vacancies, there are only 4 active postings for Full Time RN's, RPN's and PCA's, and 7 postings for Temporary Full Time Contracts. Given the shortages, lock up's, staff being ordered to extend and the use of agency staff, it's clear that placing staff in these vacancies needs to be a top priority. The Union recommends that the employer expedite the process of filling vacancies. Bill 195 allows healthcare facilities significant latitude to take reasonably necessary measures related to staffing to respond to, prevent and alleviate the outbreak of Covid-19. Although the Union opposes unilateral action that circumvents Collective Bargaining Rights, we do remain open to having discussions with the employer to find temporary solutions that are mutually beneficial to our members and the efficient operation of the hospital. We encourage the employer to consider what can be done quickly to fill vacancies and reduce the last-minute staffing model.

We look forward to further discussion and hope that collaboration will bring productive results.

Justin LeGros
President, OPSEU Local 329

Sean Hazell
Vice-President, OPSEU Local 329