Health-care sites improving safety for nurses and other staff

VANCOUVER – Four high-priority health-care sites will be safer thanks to collaboration between the Ministry of Health and the BC Nurses’ Union (BCNU).

As part of the ministry’s Violence Prevention Action Plan, the ministry and BCNU will jointly provide $2 million to fund violence prevention actions at sites that deal with some of the province’s most complex patients.

“Violence is never acceptable. Yet we recognize, in many health-care workplaces, when people are under physical or mental stress, there is a potential for violent behaviour,” said Health Minister Terry Lake. “That’s why we’re working to make health-care facilities throughout the province as safe for staff and patients as possible, starting with funding safety improvements at these four sites.”

The ministry and the BCNU have each committed $1 million toward safety improvements at facilities that care for complex patients, where there is a higher risk of violence against staff.

“We are pleased the Ministry of Health is working with us to create safer worksites for nurses,” said BC Nurses’ Union president Gayle Duteil. “These actions provide the first steps in protecting some nurses from assaults and injury. We look forward to further collaboration at other sites throughout the province.”

The first four priority sites are Forensic Psychiatric Hospital in Coquitlam, Hillside Centre in Kamloops, Seven Oaks Tertiary Mental Health in Victoria and Abbotsford Regional Hospital. Additional sites are expected to be selected by fall 2015.

Staff and leadership at the four sites have identified priority actions to improve safety that will be carried out over the next few months. Depending on the site, these may include upgrading communications and distress button systems, enhancing staffing levels and mixes where needed, and increasing education and training. Each site has a plan tailored to their specific needs and challenges, developed in consultation with the ministry, the BCNU and other unions.

“These are positive improvements that I believe will support ongoing quality patient care and improve safety for staff and patients,” said Jesse Spencer, a registered psychiatric nurse and team leader at Hillside Centre. “This has been a transparent process that brought together the knowledge and experience of our entire team. It is exciting to move forward with a plan where collaboration took place from front-line staff to ministry-level stakeholders on the important issue of violence prevention.”

In April, the Ministry of Health held the Summit to Prevent Workplace Violence in Health Care. The ministry and the BCNU used feedback from the summit and other discussions as a guide to
begin safety improvement at the initial four sites, as well as overall work to protect both staff and patients from violence in health-care workplaces throughout B.C.

A backgrounder follows.

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Safety actions at four priority sites

Actions to improve safety, which will be carried out or are currently underway at the four priority sites, include:

**Forensic Psychiatric Hospital in Port Coquitlam**

- Replacing the distress system, ensuring staff can send and receive alerts quickly and easily.
- Creating a co-ordinator position to develop and support formal mentoring programs for specialized units and new staff, with a focus on violence prevention.
- Enhancing orientation and training requirements, including an increase to orientation time.

**Hillside Centre in Kamloops**

- Increasing staffing levels to ensure staff can safely care for patients, especially during periods of lower staffing, such as night shifts.
- Adding enhanced 24/7 mental-health worker positions — these staff will be part of the care team and familiar with patient care plans, as well as having the skills for violence response and de-escalation.
- Introducing new and improved training and education, including sessions focused on interpersonal communication, respectful workplace practices and resolving conflict.

**Seven Oaks Tertiary Mental Health in Victoria**

- Introducing access to security, to help reduce the need for staff to perform hands-on patient restraint, and other high-risk activities.
- Adding a low-stimulation room, which provides a relaxing environment for agitated residents.
- Adding a clinical nurse supervisor position, to provide mentorship and further support care planning and staff education.

**Abbotsford Regional Hospital**

- Upgrading communication systems and panic buttons, ensuring staff have reliable access to help when they need it.
- Upgrading and adding security cameras in interview and triage areas, to further assist staff in acting quickly in case of violence or aggression.
- Enhancing access to seclusion room space to more appropriately care for patients that are aggressive, at risk of self-harm or at risk of elopement.
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