

July 12, 2019

VIA EMAIL

Mr. Bruce Cooper  
Deputy Minister, Health & Social Services  
Government of the NWT  
PO Box 1320  
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9

Ms. Sue Cullen  
CEO, Health & Social Services

Dear Mr. Cooper and Ms. Cullen,

**Re: Stanton Hospital Staffing and Working Conditions**

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I write to you today with concerns from Union members who are working at Stanton Territorial Hospital. I have attended numerous Local meetings in the past few weeks, and I have heard some very serious testimonials.

It is my understanding that Local 11 President Frank Walsh has had a meeting with you and COO Kim Riles to discuss some of these concerns.

I am aware of the letter from some anonymous nurses in June, which made its way to the media. I have been provided a copy of the letter that you sent to all workers at Stanton in response to this anonymous letter.

The common theme that I have heard from members is that morale is at an all-time low at Stanton. Workers have stated that they do not want to voice their concerns to management, for fear of reprisal, which I have been told extends to being seen attending union meetings. Workers are feeling that they are not being taken seriously, and are being treated dismissively. Unfortunately, that has also been the general feeling about your response letter to the nurses.

I have been told that when workers raise concerns with upper level management, they are told things like “turn your frown upside down” and “put on a poker face”.

You have acknowledged that there are major staff shortages in the health system in the north. This has resulted in procedures being cancelled, postponed, or redirected out of territory. The shortages have left the existing staff overworked and exhausted, frequently working numerous 16 hour shifts in a row. Current staff are feeling unsafe in their workplace, and feel that patient safety is also at risk. Nurses are putting patient safety first, at the expense of their own health, well-being, and safety, and are also worried about personal liability. This should not be an either/or situation – the health and safety of both patients and workers should always be paramount.

Unfortunately, the new hospital building is contributing to the problems in the workplace. Workers feel inadequately trained in the new systems in the new building, and have received limited orientation. I understand that there will be growing pains in a new environment; however, comprehensive training and appropriate orientation should have been a first priority before moving into a new location, particularly in a health care environment.

I suggest that it will continue to be very difficult to recruit strong qualified workers to the North if the morale is so low, and personal safety is an issue. This has become a vicious circle.

The Union needs to be a part of making Stanton a better place to work. Joint Union-Management Consultation meetings and Joint Occupational Health & Safety meetings must be scheduled on at least a monthly basis, and detailed minutes with action lists and motions must be kept of these meetings to ensure follow up. Suggestions and motions from union representatives need to be taken seriously, and the Union needs to be consulted in a meaningful way.

I would like to see a Steering Committee struck of Union worker representatives and Employer representatives to work together to find consequential ways to address nurses' and allied healthcare workers' concerns with morale, staffing shortages, and health and safety.

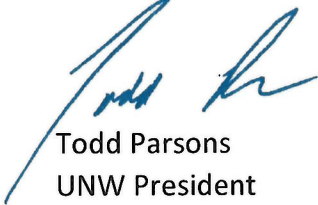
There also need to be a way for workers to report and track problem working conditions which are inadequate or dangerous to healthcare standards. The Joint OHS committee should review these reports collectively.

The Union recognizes that this will not be a quick and easy fix; it will require the Employer's commitment to a long term plan. We want to work together with the Employer to find solutions that will create a stronger, harmonious, and healthy workplace.

I look forward to hearing from Stanton and NWT Health & Social Services on a concrete, go forward plan to address staffing shortages, health and safety issues, and workplace morale.

My door is always open if you wish to meet to discuss this or any matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Todd Parsons', is written over the typed name and title.

Todd Parsons  
UNW President

cc via email:

Minister Glen Abernethy, Minister of Health and Social Services

Nicole MacNeil, Director, Labour Relations

Kim Riles, Chief Operating Officer, NWT Health & Social Services Authority

UNW Executive

Anne Marie Thistle, UNW Director of Membership Services

Frank Walsh, UNW Local 11 President

UNW Local 11 member email list