



*"I am being told that morale at the shiny new hospital is at an all-time low," says Union of Northern Workers president Todd Parsons.*

PHOTO BY JAMES

## *A cry for help at the shiny new hospital*

I am sure you have also seen the stories in the media recently about the letter from nurses regarding staffing and working conditions at Stanton Territorial Hospital. I have been meeting with members over the last month or so, and the message from them is pretty clear: The response from their employer that the nursing shortage is Canada-wide is just not acceptable.

I am being told that morale at the shiny new hospital is at an all-time low. Nurses and allied health workers are saying that they are so tired, stressed and concerned about patient safety, that it is now normal to see a worker crying at the end of their shift(s). They are frustrated, they are broken down, they are exhausted.

So what about this nursing shortage? This isn't new. A quick Google search shows articles going back at least five years. So where is the creative thinking?

The nurses brought this story to the forefront, but the staff shortage is not just nurses. And nurses and allied health workers aren't just complaining. They have ideas, solutions, suggestions, but they say no one in upper management is listening to them. If you are having a hard time recruiting nurses, why aren't you beefing up the support staff?

How about more nurses' aides, porters, LPNs? Hey, why are nurses cleaning rooms?

Well, that opens up another can of worms. The union has been told that the shiny new hospital is a huge part of what is exacerbating the problems. Here is something people – not just unions – have been saying for years: The public suffers when the government uses P3 (Public Private Partnership) projects.



**LABOUR Views**

Todd Parsons is president of the Union of Northern Workers.

Dexterra, a private company, owns the shiny new hospital and is in charge of food services, housekeeping, maintenance and security. They are hiring well meaning, hardworking individuals who are trying their best but they are operating with critically low numbers of people and they aren't getting the training they need. A private company's bottom line is profit, and in this kind of industry, the only way to keep profits up is to have fewer workers and pay them less.

Dexterra's call centre for housekeeping is in Toronto. So when a nurse calls for a room to be cleaned so they can move another patient in, they reach a voice in Toronto, who dispatches the cleaning staff. When housekeeping doesn't show up, the nurse calls back, and is told "well, we dispatched them." And now the nurse is cleaning the room, when they should be nursing patients, in an already short-staffed situation.

Meanwhile, high level management says "turn that frown upside down" and "use this as a leadership learning oppor-

tunity" and "put on your poker face" and "you can leave if you don't like it." Actual quotes.

One story we have been told that shows the mindset of the owners: A Dexterra hospital owner on a visit introduces himself as the owner, and refers to the health care workers and patients as his tenants.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. I haven't even started on the shiny new technology that nobody has time to train anyone on, the emergency plans that were done up without consulting the workers who have to implement them, nor have these workers been trained on those plans.

Of course this is not limited to Stanton. This "nursing shortage" and support staff shortage affects our clinics, hospitals and nursing stations in all our communities. Management needs to start listening to their workers and working with the union. Together we can build a healthier, happier and safer workplace for everyone.

