

May 15, 2019

The Honourable Minister Cameron Friesen
Minister of Health, Seniors and Active Living
Legislative Building
Room 302 – 450 Broadway
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

Dear Minister Friesen,

On behalf of 12,000 Manitoba nurses, I am again writing to express our deep concern over the ongoing cuts and consolidation within the WRHA. In particular, I would like to address Dr. Peachey's return to conduct a Quality Assurance Assessment.

As you know, upon learning of this development, we immediately requested a meeting. When Dr. Peachey agreed, with just a few days' notice we brought together nurses from five of the most affected hospitals. 17 nurses in total, from a wide range of departments—Emergency, Surgery, Labour and Delivery, Medicine, Renal, Cardiac Sciences, and Critical Care—immediately agreed to tell their story. If we had more time, I expect we could have found hundreds of nurses willing to attend.

The meeting took place last Thursday, May 9. Most nurses brought prepared remarks and walked Dr. Peachey through the challenges that they have faced in their facilities and programs since the government began implementing this plan.

Their stories clearly reflected nurses' growing concerns. One nurse noted, "I have worked [as a nurse] for over 30 years. I have seen multiple changes and cutbacks, but I have never seen our unit experience the amount of stress and adversity that has followed the Phase 1 changes."

Another nurse told Dr. Peachey, "I have 26 years of experience and I will honestly admit this is the worst I have ever seen."

Another nurse told Dr. Peachey that due to increased patient volume and increased acuity, "Taking vital signs is being missed, dressing changes are not being done... Patients are not being turned, often increasing the risk of skin breakdown, bedsores, pneumonia, or blood clots developing." Another described being stretched so thin, patients were offering to change their own bandages, acknowledging that the nurses simply don't have time to provide basic care.

One nurse described her experience in Emergency, trying to manage roughly twice as many admitted patients as she had available beds. Consolidation has pushed patient volumes and acuity to dangerously high levels. Another nurse said, "We are here to strongly oppose the closure of Concordia Emergency and the Manitoba government's hospital reorganization." She went on to say that nurses "remain steadfast in our mission to provide safe patient care, but we are on a very dangerous trajectory right now. We strongly

urge the government and the WRHA to stop and listen to the frontline staff, who witness the consequences of emergency department closures first hand.”

One final quote from a nurse in our meeting: “The changes that have taken place and continue to take place are not in the best interests of the nurses or the public.”

The fact is consolidation and the thousands of deletions that accompanied it have only exacerbated existing staffing shortages. The speed with which it was done created unsafe situations, and chased experienced nurses from highly specialized areas. The message nurses gave to Dr. Peachey was clear. That’s why we were completely shocked when, the very next day, Dr. Peachey emerged to report that there was “absolute consensus” among health care providers—including nurses—that the consolidation plan was right.

The stories of these 17 nurses are not unique. They are a reflection of a system increasingly in distress. We know this because MNU polls our members regularly. This year we asked them about their level of concern with respect to the changes government has made in health care. The results are overwhelmingly negative, and reflected effectively universal agreement. 97% of nurses said they were concerned about the changes, and 70% said they were extremely concerned. These results are a far cry from “absolute consensus” that consolidation is the right approach.

I have since reached out to all 17 of the nurses who attended the meeting. Not one of them supports this plan. They are extremely concerned by the effects they’ve seen to date, and they do not want to see it continue.

Dr. Peachey’s comments were so misleading that nurses can no longer trust that his findings will be a fair and accurate representation of what’s happening in health care. We are now forced to seek some reason as to why Dr. Peachey would make this claim. With the early election rumours, we fear this review is nothing more than a political exercise to attempt to delay further cuts and closures before Manitobans head to the polls.

Putting political interests ahead of the interests of Manitoba’s patients is unacceptable. It’s imperative that you take the advice of nurses and other frontline health care providers seriously, stop the consolidation plan, including the closure of the Concordia and Seven Oaks EDs, and take immediate steps to address issues such as workload, overtime and staffing shortages that these changes have made worse.

I would be more than willing to meet with you to discuss these concerns further. I await your response.

Respectfully,



Darlene Jackson
President
Manitoba Nurses Union

Cc; Wab Kinew, Leader of the Official Opposition
Dougald Lamont, Leader of the Second Opposition