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July 14, 2021

Premier Iain Rankin  
Province of Nova Scotia

Premier:

[Long-standing issues](#) NSGEU has been sounding the alarm about are now coming to a head in the Emergency Department (ED) at the Halifax Infirmary (HI). I understand that [this is always a very busy area](#) of our health care system, but members who work in this area have approached the union with their concerns regarding staffing shortages and those concerns are troubling.

The proper staffing for an ED shift normally includes 17 nurses (including the charge nurse) and four paramedics. However, that staffing complement is now routinely down to 9 nurses and as few as two paramedics.

This ED is chronically understaffed, which means members cannot take breaks, or get vacation approved. Furthermore, the ED is a particularly stressful area of the healthcare system: there are typically many patients who need to be seen each shift, and their medical complaints are more complex than ever, partially because so few Nova Scotians have access to a family physician. Throw a pandemic on top of all of this, and it's easy to understand why the ED is falling apart.

We have learned that many nurses have accepted jobs working in other areas but are not being released by their managers because they simply cannot find replacements. In the past 2.5 months, 25 nurses have left their jobs. Some of these nurses didn't even have new jobs to go to: they just needed to walk away from the intolerable stress of this working environment. This is certainly not typical: as I am sure you would agree, these professionals normally carefully map out the next steps in their careers. If nurses are just walking away from their careers, we should all be very alarmed.

Management in this area of the hospital have long been fixated on patient flow, mainly because they have been directed by government to clear the backlog in the ED. We agree that patient flow must be addressed, but it cannot be addressed without also ensuring frontline staff feel supported, and that their needs are being considered. It's all well and good to create a system to offload these patients faster, but those efforts will be futile if there is no one left in the ED to care for them.

If staff are miserable in their jobs, they will go elsewhere, and it will become harder and harder to find health care professionals willing to sacrifice their mental health and personal lives to work in the ED.

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We have reached out to management to try and identify some solutions, as our members have plenty of ideas on how to improve working conditions and morale. Unfortunately, those conversations have not proven to be productive.

I am calling on government to take immediate action to implement a program that is designed to attract and retain nurses to work in our EDs.

Yours truly,



Jason MacLean  
President

JML/lb

- c. Honourable Zach Churchill, Minister of Health and Wellness - [Health.Minister@novascotia.ca](mailto:Health.Minister@novascotia.ca)  
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