

BULLETIN

Fabiola Toyata, physiotherapist

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When physiotherapist Fabiola Toyata returned to hospital work in Prince George after a 10-year absence, she had a bit of a rude awakening.

Workload challenges, always a tough issue in healthcare, had skyrocketed in the course of a decade.

"I saw a huge change in workloads, in acuity, in the number of patients. Also, the size of patients has grown significantly, which makes things more physically demanding for physiotherapists. But there has been no increase in physiotherapist staffing levels," says Toyata, who works at both the Prince George Child Development Centre and the University Hospital of Northern BC.

Toyata's personal experience is part of what fuels her enthusiastic involvement in HSA's province-wide program aimed at engaging members and gathering information on the impact of shortages and workload (see page 10). The goal is to gain a deeper understanding of workload issues based on documented research, which can be used for strategic action and political advocacy, especially in the coming year's provincial election.

Toyata's role in the campaign is to talk with members at their worksite or through home visits, and distribute a questionnaire. When members identify a workload issue, they are asked to fill out a form for two weeks to track the details.

"What we're seeing is that people come in early, leave late, and miss breaks. This doesn't count as overtime because often we are not approved for overtime. When you add all this up, members are often donating two hours per week of unpaid labour," she says.

Toyata's main motivation is simple: she wants to make a difference in the work lives of her fellow HSA members, and improve care for clients. But she also enjoys being part of the campaign - a fact which somewhat surprises her.

"This is actually not something I ever would have thought of myself doing, even six months ago. I didn't think of myself as a political person and political is what I think of when I hear the word campaign. Also the idea of going door to door to talk to people reminds me of door-to-door sales, which I hate.

"But I really enjoy it. I really like talking to other members, and all of them want to talk about this topic. They are so happy to learn that HSA is looking into this."

The power of talk, Toyata is realizing, is huge. "Having face-to-face, one-on-one contact brings people together. It can be powerful - telling your story and asking people their story, finding out what is important to them. And then asking them to talk to five people, and then each of those people talks to five people. It works! These are the same methods that the Obama campaign used," she says.

2016 has been a year of increasing involvement in HSA for Toyata. A member for 20 years, she became a chief steward in January and in September attended a Local Leadership training workshop, which is where she

learned about the workload campaign. In October, she went for a two-day training specifically on workload issues.

"I'm really impressed with the union. The training opportunities are fabulous, and the union makes sure we have every possible opportunity to participate. For instance, when I went for training they helped pay for my child care. Also, the experience and training I'm getting in leadership can help me move forward into more leadership in my career."

Above all, she says, she values HSA for its role in supporting members' rights in the workplace, which translates into better care for clients. "If I have to go between a member and management I know that I have someone backing me."

Workload challenges haven't disappeared at Toyota's workplace, but because she is part of a campaign to address this problem, she no longer feels powerless. "The leadership training was about mobilizing people by bringing them together and creating relationships," she says. This is exactly what she is doing.

Toyota's advice for anyone experiencing workload issues?

"Make sure your supervisor is aware of it and make sure your steward is aware of it. Make sure you are tracking it with our workload tracking tool. Talk to the stewards and go from there. Don't let it go unaddressed."

To learn more about the workload campaign, and fill out the workload survey, visit www.workload.hsabc.org

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180 East Columbia
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website
www.hsabc.org

Telephone 604-517-0994
1-800-663-2017