

BULLETIN

VIHA officials asked to address specialist shortage

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By Darrell Bellaart

Health officials have been told to address a shortage of specialists who help critically ill patients with breathing difficulties at Nanaimo Regional General Hospital.

WorkSafe B.C. ruled the Vancouver Island Health Authority must provide a plan to stop scheduling respiratory therapists to work shifts as long as 24 hours. A Work-Safe inspector toured NRGH on Nov. 9 and issued an inspection report Nov. 16.

There is a currently shortage of the specialists across Canada, and in B.C. VIHA's pay scale is \$25.41 to \$31.72 per hour.

NRGH is especially hard-hit due to an "unanticipated leave" at the hospital, said Colleen Butcher, VIHA director of medicine.

"We are working and trying to find some alternatives to make sure we're providing safe care for patients," Butcher said.

"It's an ongoing problem all over the province, particularly Nanaimo right now," said Reid Johnson, president of Health Sciences Association, the union representing the workers.

Respiratory therapists help diagnose, treat and care for patients with respiratory and cardiopulmonary disorders.

Having one staff member sick can create what Johnson calls a "critical shortage" at NRGH.

The WorkSafe report says fatigue leads to "mental impairment and a subsequent increased risk of injury."

VIHA will submit its report on solutions before the Dec. 3 due date.

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