

BULLETIN

HSA challenges flu shot policy

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Health Sciences Association, on behalf of the Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association (HSPBA), is calling for the withdrawal of a province-wide policy that threatens to fire health science professionals who refuse to declare whether they have been vaccinated against seasonal flu.

-HEABC has introduced a policy unprecedented anywhere in Canada. The policy forces virtually anybody who works in health care to be immunized and make a public declaration they have been vaccinated; or wear a surgical mask every day for the duration of the declared flu season ... which can be as long as four months. The policy is punitive, since if people don't comply they risk being fired," said HSA President Reid Johnson.

-The problem is not just that the policy is overly punitive, the piece of the policy that says health professionals must wear a surgical mask when they are in a patient area if they don't wear any marker declaring they have been immunized, is completely unreasonable. How is a speech language pathologist supposed to do her work? How is an elderly patient who may be hard of hearing supposed to understand what a social worker is telling her to do as part of her post-hospital care?," he said.

-And the jury is still out on whether a surgical mask even provides protection of the spread of influenza," he added. -For example, during the H1N1 outbreak, surgical masks were deemed to not provide enough of a barrier to stop the spread of the virus."

Jeanne Meyers, HSA's executive director of legal services and labour relations, said the bargaining associations grievance of the policy calls on HEABC to declare the policy is not in force and effect.

In addition to the unions opinion that the policy breaches the collective agreement, HSA argues the policy violates members privacy rights, and rights guaranteed under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

-HSA has historically encouraged members to be vaccinated against seasonal flu, and continues to encourage members to be vaccinated. But we are firmly of the view that nobody should reasonably be expected to make a public declaration of their personal health choices. HSA will continue to defend members rights to privacy," she said.

-While we do encourage members to take advantage of on-site flu vaccine clinics or to visit their family doctor to get a vaccine, we do recognize that individual health care workers have a right to make their personal health decisions. If they choose not to be vaccinated for any number of factors ... including experiences with bad side effects to vaccines, and fundamental, philosophical, or religious objections to vaccination ... that is their right," Meyers said.

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