

BULLETIN

Fighting for safety

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by CINDY STEWART



he statistics are staggering. In Canada, on average, 900 workers die at work every year. That's more than two deaths every day.

Usually, it's a number you read in the newspaper, or a story you hear on the radio on your way to work.

But for HSA members earlier this year, the story was about someone we know. It was about one of us.

Dave Bland was a vocational rehabilitation counselor at the Richmond Mental Health team for 27 years. He was killed leaving work on January 19, 2005. An advocate for his clients, he worked tirelessly and gave of himself to the troubled people he worked with. An advocate for his profession, Dave was active in bringing recreation therapists into HSA and being recognized as paramedical professionals.

We all know people like Dave. And many HSA members are people like Dave. You give of yourselves ... sometimes to your own detriment. But never should any one of you be put into a position of personal risk when you are delivering the services that you do.

Last year, BC's Auditor General released a report about the health of workplaces in the health care setting. Health care workers told the auditor general that they have a number of occupational health and safety concerns, but the one of particular concern for staff was their personal safety and security.

-According to focus group participants, both patients and families are becoming more aggressive, and anyone can walk freely in most areas of many facilities. Especially in the evening and on nights, staff in some departments may work alone and away from easy contact with others. For staff working in the community, safety and security is an issue when they are working alone in an office or clients home," the Auditor General's report says.

The Day of Mourning, marked annually on April 28, originated in 1984 when the Canadian Labour Congress declared a National Day of Mourning for workers killed and injured on the job.

National union organizations in other countries quickly followed suit. In the United States, a Workers Memorial Day was established by the AFL-CIO. Today, working people around the world take time on April 28 to remember lost co-workers, friends and family while renewing their commitment to safer workplaces under the slogan -fight for the living, mourn for the dead."

And while we will mourn for the dead ... we have many activists in HSA who are fighting for the living.

At HSA's annual convention this month, delegates will hear from the unions Occupational Health and Safety

Committee about the heroes in our workplaces who make a difference every day ... to their patients, to their clients, and to their co-workers. They are the people who are active in making your workplace a safer one ... as OH&S stewards, members of joint OH&S committees and advocates for improved health and safety measures where you work.

I applaud their work and encourage you to seek out your HSA occupational health and safety stewards to join the fight for the living. 

Cindy Stewart is president of the Health Sciences Association of BC.

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180 East Columbia
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website
www.hsabc.org

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