

RESPIRATORY THERAPY ON LIFE SUPPORT WITH 50% VACANCY RATE AT CONCORDIA HOSPITAL

System Staffing Unsustainable, Down 10% In Overall Staffing from 2021

Winnipeg, MB April 8, 2022 - Manitoba is facing a mounting staffing crisis for respiratory therapists according to the Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals (MAHCP), the allied health union representing respiratory therapists (RTs) in Winnipeg and the Northern Regional Health Authority. Respiratory therapists are an essential part of the health-care team, providing a range of critical services, tests and treatments for patients' respiratory health needs in hospitals, clinics and the community.

"Respiratory therapists are essential to keep our ICUs, emergency rooms, urgent cares and operating rooms running, but there aren't enough of them," said Bob Moroz, MAHCP President. "This is critically important work; they keep people breathing. Understaffing cannot be an option."

Starting next week, the Concordia Hospital will be functioning with only 2.5 equivalent full-time (EFT) respiratory therapists, with the exception of one Anesthesiology RT dedicated to surgeries. Minimum baseline staffing is 5.2 EFT, resulting in over a 50% vacancy rate. Concordia Hospital operates on a 24-hour basis with an increasingly small complement of RTs. RTs are taking on additional shifts, with some staff working back-to-back 12-hour shifts, and being denied breaks. Meanwhile, respiratory therapists at Grace Hospital are reportedly being limited to only one staff member off at a time due to short-staffing.

"Concordia is struggling almost every day, and sometimes hour to hour, to cover shifts," said Moroz. "The situation at that hospital has reached a critical level, but unfortunately this is a system-wide problem. We have nowhere close to the number of RTs we need to handle another pandemic surge – there's nowhere left to pull staff from. It's unsustainable."

Registration statistics from the regulatory body, the Manitoba Association of Registered Respiratory Therapists, show the current number of registered RTs at 332, a 10% decline from a high of 365 practicing last year. Meanwhile, the Bachelor of Respiratory Therapy program at the University of Manitoba has only 16 funded training seats, a number that has remained static since the degree program's inception.

"Unfortunately, with the amount of burnout we're seeing among respiratory therapists and other allied health professionals, this sharp decline in staffing when we need them most isn't surprising," said Moroz. "What we need is an immediate plan and dedicated investment in training, recruitment and retention for this critical profession, and we need it fast."

The Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals is a union representing over 6500 allied health professionals working in more than 190 disciplines across Manitoba. For more information on MAHCP visit www.mahcp.ca.

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