

United Nurses of Alberta

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VIA FAX and EMAIL
780-735-0130

Noela Inions, Q.C.
Ethics and Compliance Officer
Alberta Health Services
Suite 900, North Tower, Capital Health Centre
10030 – 109 Street
Edmonton AB T5J 3E4

Dear Ms. Inions,

Please accept this as a formal complaint under the Code of Conduct. The complaint is made against Mr. Stephen Duckett, President and Chief Executive Officer of Alberta Health Services (AHS). AHS “strives to adhere to the highest standards of ethics and integrity.” All employee’s, including the CEO have an obligation to adhere to that standard. The conduct of CEO Duckett, as detailed below, has lacked honesty and integrity and is tantamount to bullying the staff of AHS.

The actions of the CEO should, as the Code indicates: “reflect a commitment to build trust with our patients, our community partners and all Albertans.” The actions and choices of AHS staff must be “not only morally and legally correct, but ones that will also stand the test of public scrutiny.”

CEO Duckett’s conduct has adversely affected the interests of Alberta Health Services and has caused serious morale issues. He has not chosen his words carefully when speaking with the media. His mistruths are creating an environment that hinders nurses’ ability to perform their functions and in many ways must hinder his own ability to function. Further this conduct negatively impacts the image, reputation of nurses and nursing as a profession in the eyes of average Albertan’s. As the front-line of the health care system nurses require the respect of the general population and other medical professions, without it they are at risk. Misleading the public in such is of grave ethical concern to us both.

We have outlined the following examples as repeated violations of the Code of Conduct and we request that a formal investigation commence immediately.

1. More than one year ago, CARNA released a study. The results indicated registered nurses spend, on average, 27 per cent of their workday performing non-nursing activities that could be handled by a

support worker. These results were shared with Alberta Health and Wellness along with other research findings to emphasize that patient safety is put at risk if registered nurses cannot fulfill their role but have to do other tasks due to a lack of support workers. The survey highlighted the fact there are not enough support workers to allow registered nurses to focus on the professional nursing care they have been educated to provide. These findings are supported by the significant body of research conducted over the past 10 years showing that care, when provided by RNs, can have a quantifiable effect on patient outcomes such as shorter length of stay, reduced readmission rates and reduced rates of infection. CARNA and others advocated for more effective employment of registered nurses, not reducing or replacing RNs as part of the solution to issues facing the health care system in Alberta.

Concern was expressed when some individuals began misusing this information and publicly claiming studies showed 30% of work performed by nurses should be done by auxiliary nursing staff. There is a significant difference between support staff and auxiliary nursing staff. Recently CEO Duckett spoke to the Calgary Rotary Club and misled the audience by claiming the study showed "less than half" of the work done by nurses is nursing work and the rest should be done by auxiliary nurses.

On September 18, 2009, CEO Stephen Duckett was quoted in the media as saying, "Somewhere between 25% and 70% of what a nurse does in a hospital ward could be done by someone else."

The statements from CEO Duckett are false and misrepresent the information the information from the original study and leave the impression that nurses are not fulfilling their professional obligation/contribution to the health system.

They are insulting to employees and conflict with the stated goal of AHS to become an "employer of choice."

2. On September 15, 2009, CEO Duckett wrote on his blog, "We are not currently looking at lay-offs and we will not consider lay-offs unless and until it becomes absolutely necessary. Any rumours or statements you have heard to the contrary about layoffs this week for example, are wrong, misleading and mischievous. By the end of this week you will know whether my denial or the person from whom you heard the rumour spoke truth. Please bear that in mind the next time you hear a rumour from that source. I am committed to being transparent with you, and to the extent possible I will ensure you hear things from me first, not via the media."

This was completely untrue.

On Friday September 11, 2009, representatives of AHS met with the nursing and other staff at Brooks and announced that layoffs will occur. The actual layoff notices are being delivered to staff on Friday September 18, 2009. Although the extent and exact number of eliminations was only recently made public, the plans

for this have been known for some time. There is no possibility that CEO Duckett was not aware of these layoffs. Deliberately publishing falsehoods is unethical.

3. On September 18, 2009, CEO Duckett was quoted in the media speaking about nurses and he stated:

"I don't want to say part time is a bad thing, but many of them say: 'I'm going to work three days a week and get paid and then do another two days of shifts and get paid for six days a week.' That's not on."

This is completely false, and of course impossible. No employee has the right to determine her regular hours of work. It is only the employer who can determine who works and when. No employee can decide if she will work additional shifts. Indeed, If health services were adequately staffed there would be few additional shifts to be worked by any employee.

Further, CEO Duckett has the sole decision making power over which positions will be posted and filled. As of September 16, 2009, 192 Registered Nurse vacancies were posted on the Alberta Health Services website; only 33 were regular full time.

To decide that only 15% of new vacancies would be full-time and then imply nurses choose to work part-time in order to manipulate the system is misleading the Alberta public in a way that will only serve to negatively impact nurses across the province.

4. On September 18, 2009, CEO Duckett was quoted in the media speaking about nurses and he stated:

"A nurse working in our system for a long time gets more money than any other province. Not only that, in order to get that money they work fewer hours because of the length of time for lunch breaks and morning tea breaks and afternoon tea breaks and coffee breaks and everything else."


Nurses do not have "lunch breaks and morning tea breaks and afternoon tea breaks and coffee breaks and everything else."

Nurses have one meal break, which is unpaid. Nurses have two paid rest periods per shift, as scheduled by the Employer, each of which is 15 minutes in length. This does not result in nurses in Alberta working fewer hours. Nurse agreements in all but one Canadian province provide for rest periods of this length or longer.

It is clear that CEO Duckett, by his very public and misleading commentary is in breach of the Code of Conduct and putting front line health care workers at risk of negative public scrutiny. As nurses we are expected by AHS to display the highest standard of trustworthiness and as such we expect our CEO to be held to the same high standard.



Jane Sustrik
2nd Vice President
United Nurses of Alberta



Karen Craik
Secretary/Treasurer
United Nurses of Alberta

cc: Chief Executive Officer
Dr. Stephen Duckett