

The Health Worker

Written by health workers for health workers

August 2010

STOP THE HEALTH CUTS

Staff say “WE’VE HAD ENOUGH!”

Wards and departments are closing all around us. Patients are being squeezed into overcrowded and understaffed wards. Staff are under pressure to “treat and street” people as quickly as possible so increasing numbers of patients can be pushed through ever decreasing numbers of beds.

By a RVH Domestic Unite member,

When wards and departments close, we are being asked to leave positions we have been in for years and perhaps move to a different hospital or change shift patterns, having a negative impact on home-life. Workers are worried about the security of their jobs with more and more cuts coming down the line.

Domestic staff are being cut to the bone, sometimes being asked to cover up to three areas! This means some areas are not being cleaned for a week or more. We have more beds to change, more bin runs to do and more meals to serve. Yet it is cleaning staff, not the managers or politicians, who are pilloried if wards are dirty or if infections become rife. While we’re told by management that better staffing levels are unaffordable, there always seems to be plenty of workers on duty

when an audit is being done!

While domestic and nursing staff are at skeletal levels, new layers of managers are being added. That would be fine if these managers were improving the running of the service, but instead inefficiency is getting worse. Cleaning

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practices brought into effect only last year are now being overhauled at great expense. Expensive new mops have been bought which have to be disposed of after 26 washes!

Untrained workers are once again being brought in for summer relief and per-

manent staff are being asked to train them on the spot while still having to carry out their own duties. Instead of more and more managers, frontline staff should be given a say in how to run the wards effectively and efficiently.

The Trust seems determined to work staff into the ground, piling more and more duties and targets on top of us. This is destroying staff morale, as well as the service itself.

SOME OF THE CUTS SO FAR...

**Cardio-thoracic
Elliott Dynes
ENT services
Mental health
RBHSC ward
RJMS
Theatre services
Mater acute services**

Our union leaders seem to think their role is just to tell us what cuts are coming down the line, to give us a bit of warning. We want our union leaders to be fighting back against these attacks, not sitting on their hands. If they won’t do this, they should stand aside. Workers in the health service need to get organised on the ground, stand up for our rights and demand no more cuts!

CRISIS IN NURSING

By a Belfast Trust nurse Unison member,

In a recent report, Department of Health Deputy Secretary Sean Donaghy claimed the current budget deficit in the health service here is £270 million, but was projected to grow to £570 million within the next 12 months. He stated that "the health service and patient welfare is facing its biggest crisis since the Thatcher years" and warned that "hard times lie ahead". This doesn't come as any surprise to nurses at the bedside!

Since the amalgamation of the Trusts in Belfast there has been 2,500 jobs lost. This has left wards seriously understaffed. Nurses are being hit hard. Health Trusts have dramatically reduced the number of agency staff hired to

cover for those on sick leave - another measure to drive down costs.

With further cuts and job losses threatened, it's not hard to see why staff morale is at an all time low. Staff feel increasingly insecure in their jobs. With an ever-increasing demand in services, nurses are having to shoulder an impossible workload in a very pressurised environment. Along with the stress there is also an overwhelming sense of frustration felt among nurses - due to cuts in staffing levels and resources, nurses feel they are not fulfilling patients' needs.

For the 225 nursing students due to qualify from QUB in August, the future looks equally grim. Recent interviews held for students within the Belfast Trust resulted in successful applicants

being told they'd have to go on a year and half long waiting list to wait for a job - a job that most likely will be a temporary position. Many students are having to accept the fact that, come September, they will be joining the dole queue as recruitment has been frozen. The Dept of Health has now announced 10% cut in student nurse placements at university from September.

Nurses now face pay cuts and attacks on terms and conditions. We can't rely on lobbying the politicians who are introducing the cuts. Our unions should be calling emergency meetings for all health workers to discuss how to fight against the cuts. The call for a major demonstration against cuts to public services should also be taken up by unions in the NHS.

Unions must call major demo

The political parties in the Assembly Executive may attend protests against cuts - but they're shedding crocodile tears, they all voted these cuts through!

Even before the new Tory/Lib-Dem Government announced a £6 billion cut in public spending, the health service was being squeezed by "efficiency savings" voted by the Assembly Executive, worth £700 million over three years. As a result of these cuts, health care workers are at breaking point, driven by targets and financial controls.

We didn't cause the recession or the huge public deficit. This was caused by the in-

cessant drive for profit and the greed of the bankers and wealthy, and the subsequent bailout of the banks out of our pockets! The arguments made by the politicians that there is no money is a lie as it could easily be raised if the pharmaceutical industry was publically owned and democratically run by working class people to benefit people not profit. Big business makes billions in profit from the health service. By ending all PFI/PPP schemes in the NHS, this would save £23 billion every year!

The trade union movement has a fundamental role in resisting all cuts in public services. Trade union leaders should now

respond by calling a mass regional demonstration of all communities and workers. If properly built for, such a demonstration could be a huge show of strength and give workers and communities confidence to fight back against cuts. Resistance to the cuts must also be organised in the workplace through elected shop steward committees, fully accountable and subject to recall by the members. In order to force back the politicians in Westminster and Stormont it will be necessary for united strike action by all public sector workers. If the politicians don't listen, then the unions should build for a one-day public sector strike to make them listen!

Have you any issues for The Health Worker?

If you would like to highlight an issue affecting you or your service, contact us and we will include it in the next edition. The Health Worker is written and distributed by health workers and trade union activists. We stand for democratic and fighting trade unions, where the members are in control and all union officials are elected and live on the average health workers wage.

If you would like copies to distribute at work, then contact Pat Lawlor on 07810522111 or e-mail: lawlorsrus@aol.com