



Impact

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COMPENSATION EMPLOYEES' UNION

Taking action on workload and volume

Surely everyone will agree that things are out of balance when 60 percent of us say we can't meet the standards of our jobs. In this pre-CMS world, nearly 70 percent of us say our workload negatively affects us.

(These statistics are from the 2007 CEU membership survey.)

What will these numbers be when we are trying to learn to work on the new CMS system, plus dealing with our heavy workloads? As the survey proved, workloads are already out-of-hand in some areas of the Board. We can't wait for the post-CMS world to take action. We must find ways of dealing with workload issues now.

Excessive workloads and job stress

Excessive workloads cause job stress. Job stress is defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that:

- ♦ "...occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker" [US National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)]
- ♦ "...can happen when there is a conflict between job demands on the employee and the amount of control an employee has over meeting these demands" [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS)]

Many of us will see ourselves in these definitions. We all have good reason to be concerned about job stress. Extended periods of work overload can lead to serious physical and mental health problems including heart attacks and depression. Our work should support our

mental and physical health—not cause it to deteriorate. Job stress also shouldn't sap us of the time and energy we want to spend with our families and in our communities. We are spouses, parents, grand parents, friends,

caregivers of elderly relatives, and volunteers in our communities—not just workers.

Often the effects of job stress lead to negative or "toxic" work environments characterized by interpersonal conflicts. Workers judge each other harshly and complain to management about each other. In an effort to cope, many people work through their

breaks and work unpaid overtime.

Attitudes about work and stress need to change. Managers and employees should be able to work together to problem-solve the flow of work. That way job stress can be avoided.

It may not be possible to eliminate excessive workloads overnight, but we can take action to alleviate or lessen our job stress. Such action is also part of a longer term strategy to end excessive workloads.

To illustrate what we mean, this article will describe how Burnaby staff and CEU shop steward Rachel Babour and former shop steward Marlee Sales took on workload issues in early 2008.



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Evidence of a serious problem

As the information box on this page shows, many conditions have developed over the last several years in the Burnaby SDL that have led to job stress.

Job stress conditions in Burnaby

Chronic understaffing

- Not enough case managers (CMs), vocational rehabilitation consultants (VRs), and entitlement officers (EOs)
- Only 10 CMs, with eight new in the last two years
- CM case loads of up to 150, averaging 120
- VR case loads of up to 50
- Constant changes in team structure

Frustration among team assistants (TAs)

- Understaffing and looming "downsizing"
- Feeling vulnerable within uncertain climate
- Staff dealing with high case loads
- Management not acknowledging workload

Emotional climate

A few relatively recent "traumatic events" had affected staff emotionally:

- A "white powder" incident
- An injured worker committed suicide in January 2007
- Several injured workers attempted suicide

Physical climate

- Workplace is half the size it should be
- 65 staff working in a space meant for 40
- People are working in storage closets

Organizational climate

The organization is undergoing significant changes:

- CMS
- Changes in process
- Greater demands on time
- Greater expectations



The stewards, Rachel and Marlee, were contacted daily by members who were frequently in tears or visibly shaken. The members were:

- ♦ Feeling overwhelmed
- ♦ Unable to manage the demands of the job
- ♦ Suffering from physical and mental illnesses
- ♦ Having interpersonal conflicts
- ♦ Feeling intense frustration with management and each other

As Marlee describes it, "Rachel and I found ourselves helping members with life-work balance issues, referring members to EFAP, resolving conflicts and organizing support among co-workers. We became very concerned about the health and wellness of the staff; it seemed as if the managers didn't know how to support staff in these circumstances."

The stewards take action

Rachel and Marlee tried to bring what they feared was a "looming crisis" to the attention of the SDL managers. They seemed to think that the case load problem had been solved and seemed surprised to hear that many staff felt very stressed. This prompted Rachel and Marlee to escalate their steward activity. They responded aggressively to management's criticisms of claims and the minutiae of work. They held information meetings with staff and provided them with opportunities to vent. They took steps to raise morale, such as holding a raffle of CEU promotional items. They also conducted regular "walk arounds" to check in with staff.

Unfortunately, things got worse in early 2008. An employee was terminated and a CM was disciplined. Another CM went on stress leave and a CM was loaned to another SDL. Claims volume increased dramatically and suddenly. Case loads were shuffled and teams changed. Management made these changes at the last minute, without consultation and communication with staff.

Rachel describes staff's reaction: "Not surprisingly, stress increased dramatically. Some staff sought medical help. A few were advised by their physicians to go off work. However, staff felt unable to take leave due to their work pressures. Members started to contact Marlee and me more often."

The stewards pick up the pace

Rachel and Marlee called a meeting of CMs to discuss the issues and brainstorm solutions. They then wrote a memo to management summarizing the CMs concerns

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and recommended some solutions. Before forwarding the memo to management, they ensured the CMs agreed with the content. It provided facts and details of case loads and focused on staff and management's "shared goals".

The recommendations were member-driven solutions with the goals of decreasing workload peaks and stress. They included requests for:

- ♦ Consultation and notification of case load changes
- ♦ Reduction of meetings and other commitments
- ♦ Relaxation of the case management standards
- ♦ Carry over or pay out of unused ETOs
- ♦ Recognition that all staff may not be able to work overtime

What happened?

Management's initial reaction to the memo was tepid. But, it appears Rachel and Marlee hit a nerve because, within two days, management scheduled an 'emergency meeting' with all CMs, the manager, and the director.

At the meeting, management expressed their "hurt feelings" and "disappointment" over the memo. They referred to inaccuracies in the memo, but when pressed, could only point to one. They said they couldn't relax the standards or change the team meeting structure. The regional director seemed to justify inaction by saying that conditions were worse in other SDLs.

What did this action achieve?

These are the positives that Rachel and Marlee see as resulting from this action:

- ♦ Concerns are documented for the future
- ♦ Managers and directors are aware there are problems – they can't deny them any longer
- ♦ Management is aware CMs are not meeting service goals and standards
- ♦ It will be very difficult to discipline staff based on the standards
- ♦ Overtime was approved, taking away the pressure to do unpaid overtime



As Marlee says: "It may be that management now has a better understanding of job stress issues and may have learned some valuable lessons on how to support staff."

One of the most significant achievements is the cohesiveness that is now growing amongst staff. Many CMs felt "listened to" and "empowered" as a result of the process. They have started working together and helping each other. Rachel sums it up this way: "The work culture is changing. Staff are moving away from a culture of self preservation and a feeling of solidarity with one another is beginning to emerge."

Similar action needed in other work areas

The action taken by stewards and members described in this article primarily involved CMs in an SDL. The approach, however, can be used for workload issues involving other jobs and other parts of the Board.

Stewards participated in a workshop on life-work balance at their annual two-day seminar in October. The workshop included brainstorming strategies in small groups on how to take on workload issues with management. They are ready, willing, and able to be our champions of change on this issue. They just need our support and participation to make the strategies work.

We are looking forward to the day when we don't have to strategize about workflow issues because management's attitude and approach has changed. If we work together, that day will arrive sooner.

Alternative media tells WCB TELUS story

The Columbia Journal, a local publication which bills itself as a “positive progressive alternative” to the “corporate media”, published an article on the Board’s February 2008 attempt to outsource ISD’s Technology Services.

Under the title, “WorkSafe BC staff defeat TELUS Outsourcing”, the article tells the story of how CEU members in Technology Services united to resist the Board’s attempt to send their work to TELUS.

The Journal spoke to CEU president, Sandy Wright, CEU business manager, Stan Reese, and Scott McCloy, WCB director of communications, in preparing the article.

The article was written by Tom Sandborn and appears in the September 2008 edition of the paper. You can read the article on line at <http://www.columbiajournal.ca/08-09/index.html>.

The Columbia Journal is just one example of what’s referred to as “alternative media”. These publications, most of which only publish on line, cover events of interest to union members and others. These events are usually covered in a cursory way or are ignored by “mainstream” media such as the Vancouver Sun, the Province, and BCTV. Here are some other examples of alternative media that you might want to check out:

The Tyee: www.thetyee.ca

Rabble: www.rabble.ca

Straight Goods: www.straightgoods.com

Working TV: www.workingtv.com

Labour Start: www.labourstart.org

CMA still pushing privatization

CUPE/CALM

The new head of the Canadian Medical Association is aggressively promoting health care privatization by calling for more privately-delivered services and a funding formula that forces public hospitals to compete with each other.

Newly-elected CMA president Robert Ouellet has made it clear the privatization torch is passing seamlessly from his predecessor. Ouellet says “it’s time Canada accepted [the] reality” of private, for-profit delivery of health care.

As president of the Quebec Medical Association, Ouellet always supported more privately-delivered care. He operates a string of Montreal-area private diagnostic clinics.

The CMA leadership is also promoting “patient-focused funding,” a formula that paves the way for commercialization and competition. Also known as payment by results, activity-based funding and volume-based funding, the funding formula is a ruse for privatization. In most countries where it’s been introduced, it brings competition and commercialization and forces hospitals to compete for patients and public dollars.

Canadian Doctors for Medicare founding chair Danielle Martin says adopting the formula means “lower quality, reduced accessibility, reduced efficiency and higher costs; particularly where it is linked to increased private for profit delivery.” Martin and other doctors went before the CMA meeting in August, criticizing the organization’s prescription for privatization.

British doctors also have serious concerns about payment by results (PBR) as it’s known in the U.K. In Britain, PBR has driven up administrative and overall costs and increased hospital admission rates. The British Medical Association has said PBR leads to “fragmenting care into saleable bits on which profits can be made.”

At their recent annual meeting, BMA president Hamish Meldrum called on the Labour government to get rid of the market in health care. “Let’s stop pretending that healing the sick is like trading a commodity. Let’s stop diverting doctors’ energies into unholy bidding wars for jobs they already do,” said Meldrum, who attended the CMA meeting.

The BMA position is backed by a recent study finding patients are no better off in a national health care system that’s riddled with competition.

Know Your Collective Agreement

Finding out why you didn't pass the KSAs

One of the most frustrating aspects of the Board's recruitment system is the "debrief" session that members often request when they fail a KSA test or don't meet a resume screen.

This column answers these questions:

- Why are CEU members frustrated with debriefs?
- What can you do to ensure that you get the information you are entitled to when you're told you don't meet the KSAs?
- If you have been unfairly or incorrectly assessed, how can you ensure that the CEU gets the information it needs for your grievance?

Debriefs don't work for CEU members

These are some of the problems with debriefs:

- If a member wants to bring a steward to the meeting, Human Resources (HR) often says that this turns the debrief into the informal step of the grievance process.

This can be intimidating to some members who simply want to find out where they came up short in the testing, so they'll do better next time.

- The Board often delays in scheduling debriefs saying that they are too busy with filling the competition. This isn't a major concern for those who eventually have a debrief and then understand why they didn't pass the KSAs. But if the debrief doesn't occur within 21 days of notification of having failed testing, the Board often says the members are out of time for filing a grievance. This is not reasonable for those who still believe after the debrief that they have been unfairly or incorrectly assessed.
- The information provided in debriefs is often vague and not helpful. This is frustrating when collective agreement (CA) article 17.04, "Information to Unsuccessful Applicants", clearly says that if you ask, you will be provided with:
 - The names of the successful applicants

- The reasons why your knowledge, skills, and abilities did not make you successful in the competition
- Your test and interview scores and scores of all the unsuccessful candidates (without names attached)
- A copy of your marked test results

What to do instead of a debrief

HR set up the debrief process as their method for unsuccessful applicants to find out why they failed job competitions. You won't find the word "debrief", however, in the CA. Therefore, the debrief isn't the required way to obtain the information you have the right to under article 17.04. The CEU doesn't think you should play the employer's debrief game.

So, what should you do if you don't pass KSAs and don't understand why? Don't ask for a debrief. Instead, contact your steward as soon as you're told you didn't

meet the KSAs. Stewards have the right to investigate your complaint and can help you get the information needed to determine whether or not you have been unfairly or incorrectly assessed in a competition.

If HR doesn't provide the information to your steward as requested – or takes too long to respond – your steward can grieve

that the employer is impeding his or her ability to act as a steward. In the end, the Board will have to provide the information you are entitled to.

The CEU can get test information for grievances

If the steward's investigation confirms that you have likely been unfairly or incorrectly assessed, you can grieve this through your steward. The CEU can also obtain test and exam questions for the purpose of processing your grievance if the accuracy of marking, relevance, reliability, or fairness of the test or exam are being grieved. The test or exam information is only released to authorized CEU representatives. They must not copy or distribute this information to anyone other



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than the affected grievor, witnesses, counsel, or union representatives, involved in the grievance or a subsequent arbitration, if the grievance is not resolved to the CEU's satisfaction.

Always ask for an observer when you apply for a job

Under article 17.08 of the CA, the CEU has the right to appoint observers to selection panels for posted bargaining unit positions. Observers sit through all interviews and selection panel discussions when the panel assesses each applicant.

The observers watch, listen, and take notes during selection activities, but do not participate in the selection process in any way. Observers submit their notes on a competition to the CEU and report any concerns they have about how the selection panel conducted its activities.

An observer's notes and report can help your steward in determining whether or not a grievance is indicated on a competition. Union observers also make recruitment more transparent. When an observer sits through the selection process, you, as an applicant, have some assurance that bias won't enter into the selection panel's discussions. If it does, the observer will report it to the CEU.

To request an observer, call the CEU office at 604-278-4050. If you are concerned about privacy, please be aware:

- Observers must keep everything they see and hear strictly confidential. They may only speak about what occurred in a competition to a CEU representative assigned to act on a grievance.
- The CEU staff member who notifies the Board that the CEU is appointing an observer won't tell the Board who made the request

Approach should result in less frustration

To sum up, when you apply on a posted job, the CEU recommends that you:

- Request an observer, in case the CEU needs to know more about the selection panel's activities.
- Ask your steward to investigate if you are told that you have failed a KSA test or resume screen and want information about why.

Whenever you apply for a competition, you are focused on being successful. But if you aren't, and you have concerns about the testing, the two-pronged approach suggested in this article may help you understand why, or improve the CEU's ability to win a grievance.

Just the facts

Statistics Canada/CALM

Here are some quick facts on unions from Stats Canada's annual Perspectives on Labour and Income.

The average unionized worker is paid \$23.58 an hour while the average non-union worker is paid \$18.98.

The majority of union members are now women, which has been the case since 2006. The unionization rate for women (30 per cent) exceeds men's (28.7 per cent)—2.15 million women and 2.07 million men are union members.

Unionized women are closer to achieving pay equity than non-unionized women. Women in unionized full-time jobs average 94 per cent of union full-time men's average (\$23.36 versus \$24.83). The wage gap is much bigger for non-unionized full-time women who earn only 81 per cent of non-union full-time men's average (\$18.16 versus \$22.50).

A full-time union workers' average wage is \$24.15. Full-time non-union workers average only \$20.55.

A part-time union workers' average wage is \$19.99. Part-time non-union workers earn dramatically lower pay of \$12.56

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