

SGEU Health Providers:

On August 12, the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) seeking vendors to provide a hotline service for members of the public to make anonymous reports about employees and others suspected of violating SHA policies, codes of conduct or other legal requirements. The hotline could also be used by staff to report on coworkers.

This RFP and the initiative it supports came as a complete surprise to SGEU and other health provider unions, who immediately expressed concerns to the SHA. A spokesperson for the health authority told media outlets a policy review is taking place across the SHA and the whistleblower policy was not the result of a specific incident.

Fortunately, by August 14, the RFP was rescinded by the SHA.

The SHA did not mention the possibility of a whistleblower hotline during any of the regular discussions held with representatives from the health provider unions. SGEU believes such a hotline is a waste of money as it duplicates complaint processes already in place and does not address the most critical needs in the health care system.

Complaints from the public are routinely handled by patient advocates or quality of care coordinators in the health care system, as well as through regulatory bodies such as the Saskatchewan Registered Nurses Association and the Saskatchewan College of Physicians and Surgeons. Money earmarked for a whistleblower hotline would be much better spent on recruiting and retaining front-line health care staff, equipment, and needed repairs and replacements of infrastructure.

As for staff reporting on coworkers, it is ultimately the responsibility of managers to ensure employees are adhering to policies and codes of conduct. Introducing a whistleblower hotline operated by a third party could cause confusion, create a threatening and unhealthy work environment, and remove a fundamental responsibility from SHA management.

SGEU is pleased the RFP has been rescinded, and hopes the SHA has learned a valuable lesson. However, we will continue to monitor this issue to ensure the SHA provides full details in a transparent manner prior to moving ahead with initiatives that impact health care workers and the patients and clients in their care.

Bonnie Erickson, Chair  
SGEU Health Providers Negotiating Committee