

Reopen Rural Emergency Rooms

Saskatoon – The members of SEIU-West were happy to hear that the Ministry of Health and the Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) were responding to concerns raised about the closure of emergency rooms (ERs) in a number of rural communities.

“The impact of scaling down these facilities to *Alternate Levels of Care* is huge for rural communities,” said SEIU-West President, Barbara Cape. “It’s not only the loss of services and the requirement to travel further in the event of an emergency, but we have also seen the immediate impact on our members who do diagnostics in those communities.

Alternative Level of Care (ALC) is a designation being used by the SHA to create capacity in larger health facilities for COVID-19 patients by transferring non-COVID-19 patients to regional hospitals. In some cases, less than 48 hours’ notice was provided to facilities and staff of the change to the status of the ER.

“While on standby, I’m expected to drop everything and respond to an emergency,” said Combined Lab and X-ray Technologist (CLXT) Dana Billett from Davidson. “We need to keep our rural hospitals open and available to respond to an emergency. I don’t understand why they are closing rural emergency rooms – haven’t we flattened the curve for the COVID-19 pandemic?”

CLXT’s are expected, on a scheduled basis, to be on standby assignment and in the case of an emergency they must come back into the workplace. This LEAN initiative creates a ‘just in time’ workforce without any corresponding commitment from SHA to honour those hours.

“Front line health care workers are experts in their field and are willing to come in to do the work. While we understand there is a need to prepare for a potential surge, the communications on this with municipalities, members and their unions have been terrible,” continued Cape. “We question the logic and the efficiency with running a provincial health care system in this haphazard fashion; these are people’s lives we’re dealing with here.”

“CLXT’s are part of a healthcare team in rural hospitals and we all take call and give up countless things in our private lives to keep these hospitals running for the people of Saskatchewan. It’s not voluntary like overtime. We have to keep our labs staffed 24/7,” said Billett.

SEIU-West has set up a page dedicated to information about the coronavirus for their members (https://www.seiuwest.ca/covid_19_coronavirus).

Service Employees International Union West (SEIU-West) represents over 13,000 people across Saskatchewan. They include people who work in health care, education, municipalities, community-based organizations, retirement homes and other sectors. They are joined by one colour – purple – and one union – SEIU-West. Visit [PurpleWorks.ca](https://www.purpleworks.ca) to find out more about SEIU-West members.

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For more information, contact:

Christine Miller, Communications Coordinator
Phone: 306-477-8733

