

Lab Testing Capacity Still Lacking in Saskatchewan

Saskatoon – SEIU-West members who work as part of Saskatchewan’s lab services team are knowledgeable, organized, smart, caring individuals who are working hard every day to do the best for their patients. However, shortages of both staff and equipment remain obstacles to meeting the baseless promises on COVID19 testing capacity made by Premier Scott Moe last month.

“We’ve confirmed that three Lab Scientist positions at Royal University Hospital in Microbiology were filled in August through an internal shuffle,” says Barbara Cape, President of SEIU-West. “Their training needs are now near complete and we have no information about whether their vacated positions have been backfilled.”

Before the pandemic struck, Saskatoon lab services processed approximately 4,000 routine tests per day. Today that number has risen to approximately 5,400 tests per day, with COVID-19 tests taking a priority. Without additional resources a backlog of test results is inevitable.

“We have been advised that Medical Lab Tech (MLT) postings in RUH have also been filled by way of internal transfers, so until all of these vacated positions are backfilled and all training needs are met, there is an understaffing vacuum between Moe’s political promise and actual reality,” continues Cape. “The central intake area for COVID19 specimens, which was supposed to be set up at St. Paul’s Hospital, remains a vacant twenty by thirty-foot room, while constant overtime demands are being placed upon our members who work in Specimen Management.”

Cape reiterated the fact that SEIU-West members have been very vocal for the last three years highlighting the need for the provincial government to further invest in Lab Services. Both SEIU-West members and executives have reached out extensively to the Minister of Health, Premier Scott Moe, their MLAs and health care leaders from across Saskatchewan to ensure they were aware that provincial labs are under resourced – and that was before the COVID19 pandemic was declared.

Unfortunately, this same group of health care decision-makers has promised the public an expectation of 4,000 COVID-19 tests per day, a target they know is impossible for lab staff to meet.

“We want the public to know if a patient’s COVID test takes priority, then another patient’s medical diagnosis may be delayed as there are no new added resources available to do all of the testing in a timely fashion,” said Cape. “What is the plan when flu season hits and these numbers balloon?”

It is important to note that SEIU-West members working for the SHA have been without a contract since March 31, 2017.

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 to find out more about SEIU-West members.

-30-

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