

Nurses touting health care

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Nurses across Canada are calling on the Canadian premiers who are meeting in Regina this week to put health care, which is critical in any pandemic planning, on their agenda.

The Saskatchewan Union of Nurses (SUN) and the **Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions** (CFNU) hosted a drop-in health clinic in Wascana Centre on Wednesday to highlight the need for Canada's health system to undergo a check-up.

Premiers need to agree on a common framework with targets for implementation to protect health-care workers during a pandemic, said CFNU president **Linda Silas**.

"We urge the premiers to think about the protection of health-care workers and the health human resources strategies that have to be developed by employers and unions in each of the provinces to ensure adequate health human resources during a pandemic," Silas said.

SUN president Rosalee Longmoore said Saskatchewan has made some headway in hiring more nurses, but there is a systemic problem.

"The major thing that we are facing today in the health-care system is the shortage of (long-term and acute-care) beds as well as a shortage of health providers," Longmoore said.

Longmoore is predicting that the first health human resource challenge Canada's health-care system will face is finding the nurses to conduct mass H1N1 immunization clinics this fall at a time when staff are already busy doing regular immunization for seasonal influenza.

"We know that our public health nurses are tapped heavily during influenza vaccination season and now they have another (vaccination program) on top of it," Longmoore said.

Silas suggested that the health ministers look at utilizing retired nurses, student nurses and nurses who work in offices to help with the massive H1N1 vaccination program.

"We need to be creative, but we need to start planning now," she said.

"We can't have a health-care system working on overtime because if we have a system that does not have a plan, we will have a crisis. How do you deal with a crisis? It's with overtime and then our members get sick and can't show up for work."

The nurses' unions want a commitment from the premiers this week that their concerns will be addressed and will be requesting follow-up meetings with the provincial health ministers prior to September's Health Ministers Council meeting.

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• Colour Photo: Roy Antal, Leader-Post / Audrey Bruch has her blood pressure checked by Saskatchewan Union of Nurses president Rosalee Longmoore.

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