



Professional Responsibilities during a Work Stoppage or Strike

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An RD is employed in a unionized position. There is potential for a labour disruption in the next couple of weeks. RDs and other health care providers may go on strike. What are the RD's professional obligations during a strike situation?

PREVENTING HARM TO CLIENTS

Labour disruptions or strikes often place RDs in a difficult situation where they must balance their professional obligations to provide safe, effective and quality client-centred care with the labour issues of their union. The College expects that during a labour disruption or a strike, RDs provide dietetic services that are urgent or otherwise necessary to prevent harm. It is likely that an RD's employer has an essential services agreement with the union to ensure that crucial services are provided to clients in the event of a strike. It is a professional responsibility for RDs to work with their employer, other RDs and the interprofessional team to determine which clients are in need of essential services and who should provide them.

ESSENTIAL SERVICES PLAN

To ensure that clients are safe and to prevent harm, it is important to plan for a potential labour disruption or a strike.

Identify the essential service clients

It is most important to determine which clients require continued care during a work stoppage. These decisions will depend on the complexity of the client care and risk to the clients should dietetic care be discontinued. Some examples of clients that could be at risk would include:

- Clients on enteral or total parenteral nutrition;
- Clients with dysphagia;

- Clients with poorly controlled diabetes;
- Clients post-transplant or recent post-op; and
- Clients with severe gastrointestinal disorders.

Determine who will work during the labour disruption

In planning for a potential labour disruption, determine who is assigned to work and decide which dietitian(s) are best suited to provide the care for the clients that have been identified for essential services. When making the decision, factor in the expertise and competence of individual RDs to ensure that care is provided safely. Where an RD is not competent in a particular area, work with your employer and the team to provide safe essential care.

All documentation should be kept up to date and client health records must be accessible so that essential service health care providers can access them. The College would also suggest that clients be notified and kept informed of the labour disruption, and when the strike is over, dietetic services must be resumed promptly.

Deciding to withdraw services

Above all, consider the following questions before making a decision to withdraw dietetic services:

- What is in the best interests of clients?
- Will clients be abandoned?
- Will the public be deprived of access to dietetic services?
- Will clients or the public be placed at risk of harm?

TAKING ON OTHER DUTIES

RDs may be asked to take on duties from other striking health providers and perform tasks outside of the dietetic scope of practice. RDs may accept reassignment of other duties provided they have the required knowledge, skills and

competence to do so. RDs should work with their employer to determine what is in their clients' best interests, while also considering their own personal safety during a strike or work stoppage.

PROFESSIONAL MISCONDUCT

The College's *Professional Misconduct Regulation* applies even during a work disruption or a strike. It states that RDs can be found to be in professional misconduct by:

"9. Discontinuing professional services that are needed unless,

- i. the client requests the discontinuation,
- ii. alternative services are arranged, or
- iii. the client is given reasonable notice to arrange alternative services, and

10. Discontinuing professional services without reasonable cause contrary to the terms of an agreement between the member and the member's employer."

It is also professional misconduct if RDs:

"18. Fail to inform the member's employer of the member's inability to accept specific responsibility in areas where specific training is required or where the member does not feel competent to function without supervision, and

19. Treating or attempting to treat a condition that the member knew or ought to have known was beyond his or her expertise or competence."

By following the above advice, RDs can ensure that they are meeting their professional obligations in the event of a strike or other job action.