



Swine Flu Threat Good For Unions?

Insights

11.01.09

(Healthcare Update, No. 4, November 2009)

Using scare tactics to drum up fear has long been used by unions to generate unhappy employees, and to provide a good environment for unionization. Some unions are now using the H1N1 virus, or swine flu, to create controversy, rather than unifying and assisting hospitals and other industry employers in preparing for a possible pandemic. Finding a topic to exploit with workers is nothing new, and using a topic that scares many *and* can create a panic is just icing on the cake.

Unions are using the swine flu to their advantage, by reporting that healthcare organizations are unprepared to handle pandemics, and that workers are at risk. In fact, only days after the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology predicted nearly 2 million Americans could be hospitalized due to swine flu infections this winter, and as many as 90,000 could die, the California Nurses Association (CAN/NNOC) posted an article on its website claiming that hospitals are not prepared for an H1N1 flu, or swine flu season.

The CAN/NNOC website claims that "one-fourth of the hospitals" have inadequate isolation of the swine flu, and that nurses at 15% of the hospitals do not have access to proper respirator masks. Of course, there are very limited details as to how this information was obtained, such as how many hospitals were surveyed, what questions were asked, or whether the nurses asked those in charge to provide information or provided it based on their own knowledge.

The CAN/NNOC goes even further and invites nurses to attend various "actions" to demand that hospital administrators immediately implement safety improvements for nurses and patients. It is also attending legislative meetings and verbally demanding hospitals provide adequately for nurses in such a pandemic.

Hospitals and other industry employers need to be prepared for questions from employees on H1N1 flu and what the company is doing to be prepared for such a pandemic. Healthcare providers should also be ready to address concerns to the public should a demonstration occur outside the hospital. A well-placed piece in the local newspaper, or flyers inside the facility providing insight on what the hospital is doing, can be a good offensive measure to demonstrate that the hospital cares for its staff and patients, and can keep your organization from being an easy union target.

