

Fact sheet combats workplace bullying

By **DEBORAH A. MILES**

A new fact sheet on how to deal with bullying and co-worker conflict is now available to PEF members, as a result of the almost daily reports about incidents occurring from Long Island to Buffalo. It is a problem that is getting worse as short-staffing and cutbacks trigger tempers.

"This fact sheet is the first of its kind produced by a labor union in the U.S.," said Jonathan Rosen, PEF director of occupational safety and health.

"It's important for members to address the problem and not suffer in silence," added Kathy D'Arminio, PEF health and safety chair.

"The fact sheet reminds people to document all incidents and outlines efforts to remedy the problem organizationally and individually. It advises members to talk to a union representative, supervisor, top manager or trusted colleague for help," she said.

PEF Vice President Pat Baker, a key figure in the fight against workplace



violence, said, "This is an ongoing battle, but the union is making progress. This fact sheet will not only help guide members to resolve an issue they may be experiencing, but it also will benefit administrators in helping to make their workplaces safer for all."

PEF addressed bullying and co-worker conflict when it partnered with the University of Maryland (UMD) in a federal project funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The first phase was a questionnaire survey given to workers in five state agencies in 2009. Approximately 40 percent of the 13,000 respondents said they had been ignored, shunned, humiliated or ridiculed during the prior six months. Ten percent said they were bullied.

As a result, PEF and UMD developed a pilot intervention program to prevent co-worker conflict at the state Department of Taxation and Finance.

"This agency was selected because it has a high-functioning workplace-

violence-prevention committee," said Matt London, PEF health and safety specialist and project manager.

Todd Kerner, a PEF Executive Board member at the tax department, said a stressful environment contributes to co-worker conflicts.

"Our goal is to help people resolve a conflict before it becomes a full-blown crisis or outright bullying. To accomplish this, a training session has been planned for staff in the Buffalo and Rochester district offices, and a call center," Kerner said.

The training will take place in March. Kerner said it was a cooperative effort between the health and safety committee and the agency's human resources department.

London said an effective program should include the development of policies for proper conduct, procedures for reporting incidents, safeguards against retaliation, and provisions for fair and timely investigations of alleged incidents.

If you are interested in the fact sheet, you can download it from the PEF website at www.pef.org/health-and-safety.

Nurses subcommittee becomes role model

By **DEBORAH A. MILES**

For the past four years, nurses who work at the state Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS) have seen some improvements in their working conditions. That's due to the forming of a separate nurses subcommittee, established by PEF and DOCCS at a labor-management conference at Lake Placid in 2008.

PEF Labor-Management Chair Tom Donahue and Commissioner Brian Fischer helped establish the subcommittee, allowing it to work in a cooperative manner to identify and address specific nursing issues.

"The committee is very functional," said Tim Quain, a committee member and nurse at Clinton Correctional Facility. "It's probably one of the better committees in all of the state, as far as both sides actually sitting down and working out issues."

One example is scheduling. Quain said each facility had its own system, even deciding who would work when and where on a day-to-day basis. Now, because of discussions at the table, some general rules have been developed.

"Labor looks at how something affects a person. Management looks at how it affects DOCCS in general. At the

subcommittee meetings, we have the opportunity to show management how a certain situation is affecting a nurse. With open communication, we can suggest how to deal with an issue."

Barb Tournon, subcommittee chair and a nurse at Riverview Correctional Facility, said, "There are a lot of advantages to having a nurses' subcommittee. We did a lot of talking about mandatory overtime. It helped tremendously. A lot of little things also get resolved at the meetings."

One of the things the subcommittee is discussing currently is the Telemedicine system with Erie County Medical Center. Telemed, as it is commonly called, allows nurses to visit with physicians live over video for an immediate-care plan. Quain said both the nurse and doctor can see each other on a television screen.

"It works through telephone lines, and the television works as a monitor. For example, a nurse could place a stethoscope on a patient and a doctor can actually hear what is going on with that patient. Nurses now have a source for information for patients who require a higher level of care," Quain said. "That's a result of the subcommittee."

Jemma Marie-Hanson, chair of the nurses committee, said the positive outcome from the DOCCS nurses

subcommittee should be an inspiration to other nurses to develop their own subcommittees.

"Many things get resolved at the labor-management (L-M) table. Nursing issues are special. Anything that involves the health care of a person needs special attention. I would recommend nurses at all facilities consider forming a local L-M subcommittee," Marie-Hanson said.

To start one, Quain recommended selecting a good topic and develop a rapport with management.

"Be careful what you ask for. I've found at L-M meetings, when things don't go well, it's because no one has a solution. Have a solution and ask management to take a look at it. Sometimes, that's all it takes to get them to step over the line and say, 'You know, that may be a better way of doing something.'"

Tournon said to get a subcommittee off the ground, nurses should contact their PEF council leader or steward to help canvass staff for participants.

"Issues don't get resolved if no one talks about them," Donahue added. "The DOCCS nurses subcommittee is a model for others to follow."