



THE INSTRUCTOR

Strike Mandate Needed to Provide Strong Support at Conciliation *Karen Harper, CUPE 3912 President*

Voting Yes to a strike vote will give us the mandate we need

After years of preparation, months of bargaining, weeks of discussing financial proposals, we are now days away from conciliation at Dalhousie, and expect that we will soon follow at SMU and MSVU. All the experts agree: it is best to have a strike mandate (successful strike vote) going into conciliation. A strike mandate provides essential support for the bargaining team and does not necessarily lead to a strike. Here I provide detailed information and instructions for voting, and the rationale for why you should vote Yes to give the bargaining teams a strike mandate if or when we hold a strike vote. **Wage Parity Now!**

Vote. The most important thing is for you to vote. Because of NS legislation, not voting is the same as voting no.

Who can vote? All employees during the current semester who are TAs, demonstrators, markers, hourly-paid instructors and per course instructors can vote at Dal, and those who are per-course part-time instructors can vote at SMU or MSVU. Everyone who can vote will receive an email. If you are uncertain as to

whether you can vote, please [email Dave](#).

What if I am a TA at Dal? What if I am a demonstrator or marker at Dal? What if I have a full-time job and I am just teaching one course? What if I am retiring after this semester? Please vote Yes! We are a diverse group and we need all members to vote Yes.

Should I vote at more than one university? If you are teaching at two or more universities, please vote at each university. This will be a separate vote and you will receive a separate email ballot for each vote.

When to vote? Once the executive sets a date, we expect the online vote will take place over a 24-hour period on that date.

How to vote? You will receive an email with a link to the online vote. There will only be an online vote. If you have any problems, please [contact Dave](#).

Why vote? As stated above, the NS legislation considers a successful vote as one in which 50%+1 of all current employees vote Yes. This means that if you

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don't vote, it's the same as voting no. If you want to vote no, you should still vote. We want to hear your voice. We will also consider the percentage of those who vote.

Reasons to vote Yes! The bargaining teams need a strike mandate. A strike mandate means that members are willing to go on strike if bargaining at conciliation breaks down and does not result in an agreement. But more often having a strong strike mandate means that an agreement is reached during conciliation or sometimes at the last minute before a possible strike. Obviously all current employees can and should make their own decision. But the bargaining teams are hoping you vote Yes. Here is why we think you should vote Yes to a strike mandate:

The more members that rally behind a strike, the less likely they are to go on strike.

If we get a strike mandate, we get 100% funding from CUPE National for a strike avert campaign. The purpose of this campaign is to get a fair deal for a collective agreement by raising awareness among members, the community and the public without the need to go on strike. But most current employees need to vote Yes to get this funding.

Strike pay starts at \$300 per week and increases the longer



we are on strike. Members actively on strike receive strike pay for being on the picket line or for other support duties (accommodations can be made) for at least 20 hr per week. For some members, this will be more than they make teaching. We can also create a hardship fund and find other ways to help members that might experience financial hardship during a strike.

A strike mandate puts pressure on the employer to reach a fair deal for our members.

If you are not concerned about your own financial situation, please think of your fellow members, many of which are stuck with low wages and need to work at more than one university or at other jobs just to make ends meet.

Wage Parity Now! The most important reason to vote Yes is that we are among the lowest paid PTERS and TAs and especially markers in Canada. Yet the employer refuses to give us increases in salary beyond 1.5%, which is less than the increase in tuition and less than the cost of living. We need a substantial wage adjustment to get anywhere close to the median salaries at other universities. It really seems that the **only** way to get this adjustment we deserve is to get a strike mandate.

The time is now! Please vote Yes to give the bargaining teams a strike mandate that they need to reach a fair deal for you.

A Fair Formula

David R. Wilson, CUPE 3912 Member

What factors make for optimal working conditions for contract instructors at university?

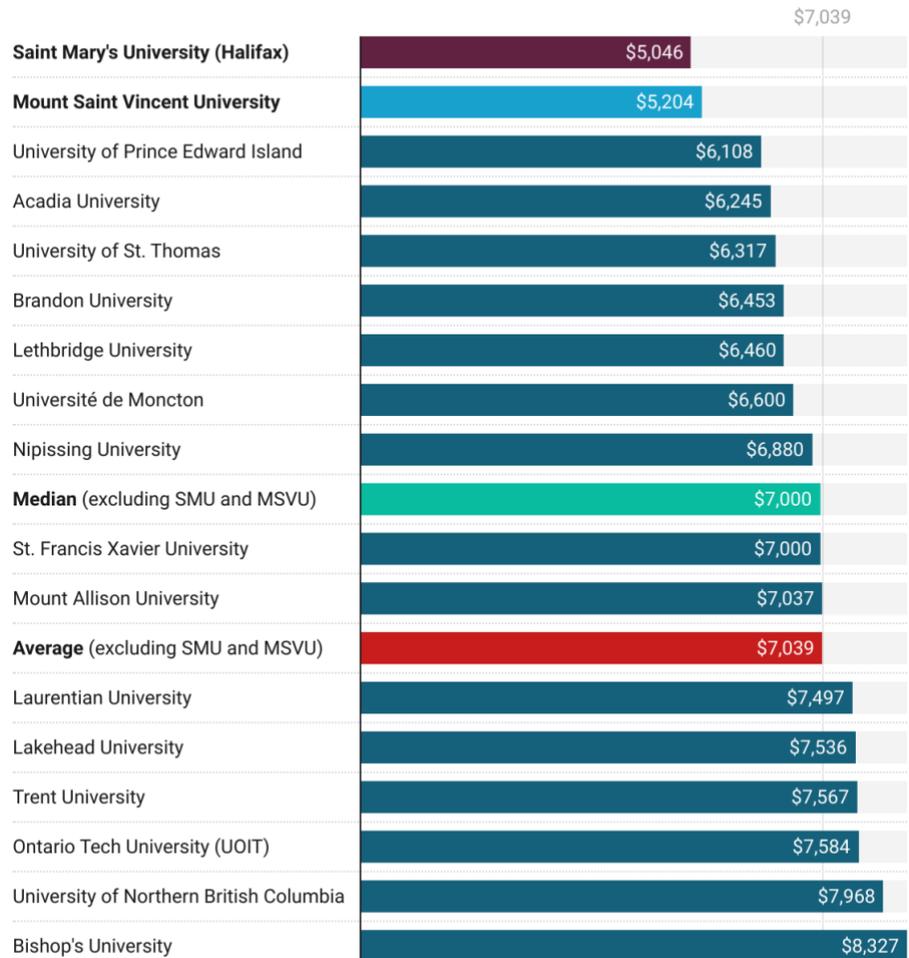
1. Improved office space
2. A supportive supervisor
3. Name on the door/website
4. Better salary
5. Access to funds for travel and research
6. Flexible schedule
7. Paid sick leave
8. Health benefits
9. Professional development opportunities
10. Job security

The list is long and incomplete. One thing I am positive about is that the working conditions of our members are the learning conditions for our students. So let me be frank—it's about the money. The salary disparity between the full-time and contract faculty must be corrected. Our course stipend must be significantly raised.

For years, the employer has relied on a section of the workforce at a discounted rate. That means they have recouped a greater profit by knowingly underpaying contract faculty when we consider the national average. The incremental pay increases show that management does not value the integral role that contract instructors play in helping students to succeed. One can't help but see the exploitation. Despite the constraints of being underpaid and as a consequence overstressed, these instructors overwhelmingly serve with distinction at their institutions. Besides exemplary teaching, our members

Part-Time Instructor Base Stipends at Undergraduate Universities in Canada

Per 3-Credit Course with a PhD



Stipends shown include vacation pay and reflect amounts paid in the academic year 2019-2020. Data for Cape Breton University and the University of Winnipeg were not available, and therefore not included in this dataset.

Chart: CUPE 3912 • Source: CAUT • Created with Datawrapper

sit on committees, provide reference letters for students, conduct research, attend conferences, publish papers, mentor, sit on thesis-defense boards, design sophisticated websites, promote student work, and actively participate in campus life. Much of this labour is invisible. And unpaid.

What is clear is that each time our contract is up for negotiation the employer claims that we are already adequately compensated. It's Groundhog Day meets Catch-22. Management's business-as-usual attitude needs to modernize. The pandemic has magnified our definition of acceptable working conditions. The last two years

have taken a toll on contract faculty with increased workload online and more marginalization at university. We must endure short-term contracts, lack of venues to feel safe giving input, or have our contributions to the university recognized. These factors have been compounded by the sudden rise in inflation. Our pay keeps falling short when we try to pay the rent and buy groceries. So, how can a union challenge the orthodox view that a fractional increase is acceptable?

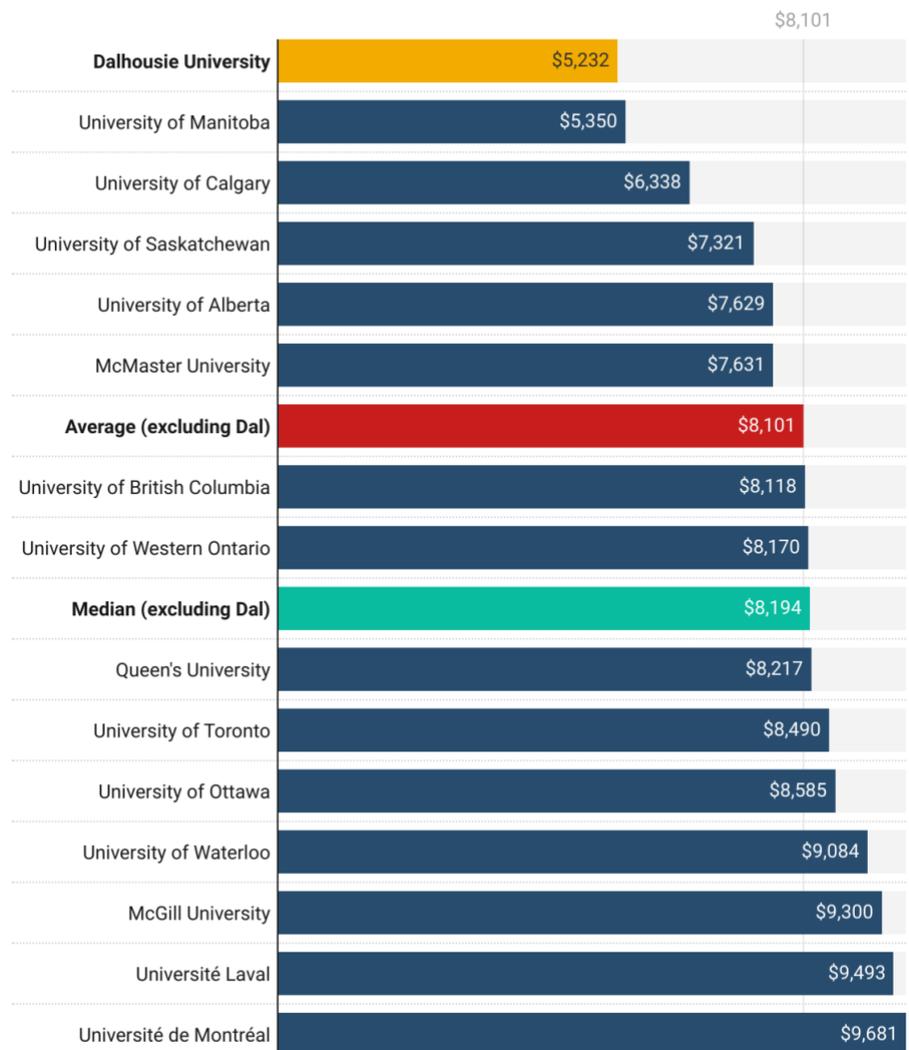
Rebalance the scales.

For instance, what portion of the full-time faculty's salary is dedicated to their teaching duties? Dr. Karen Foster, assistant professor of sociology at Dalhousie, in her study, maintains that full-time faculty are "paid a salary based on 40% teaching, 40% research, and 20% service" ([Nina Corfu, CBC, Sept. 19, 2016](#)). While that model has the veneer of truth, the numbers don't quite add up. A deeper dive into the data reveals a different reality—the math behind that business model actually serves the interests of the administration's official policies for compensation. The 40/40/20 status quo is not a true measure of what occurs at universities. Indeed, two studies have determined that it might be closer to a fairy tale.

A 2014 [report](#) by the Higher Education Council of Ontario surveyed three faculties (Economics, Philosophy, and Chemistry) at ten universities. The authors discovered that 19% of tenured faculty don't regularly contribute scholarly output. They thought that some universities would be more effi-

Part-Time Instructor Base Stipends at U15

Per 3-Credit Course



Stipends shown include vacation pay and reflect amounts paid as of September 1, 2020.

Source: Canadian Association of University Teachers • Created with Datawrapper

cient if the workload was distributed 80% teaching, 20% service. In a July 2019 [article](#) in the *Times Higher Education*, Nick Mayo also examined the 40/40/20 model. In a poll of faculty, 65% of the respondents admitted that they can only manage to devote 20% of their time to research. Moreover, 80% of faculty surveyed claimed that the 40/40/20 model wasn't "achievable," let alone sustainable. What can we conclude?

The current model is faulty; however, this standard appears to

suit administration. It's more fiction than truth since universities portray themselves as research intensive, when in actuality the data shows otherwise. This scenario is comparable to contract faculty, who do the bulk of teaching. The metric used to calculate our pay is flawed and outdated.

Equal pay for equal work is a fundamental workplace principle; however, it doesn't seem to pertain to academic labour. For years, the employer has denied contract faculty a bigger pay cheque. Administrators' factory

setting is that such an increase is too expensive. We see this already with the variable pay for contract instructors at universities across Canada. CAUT conducted a national survey a few years ago, and the results for contract faculty were bleak: we remain a financially vulnerable workforce. There should be a major adjustment to our members' course stipend. Otherwise, it's just another three years of theatre of the absurd. We live in a data-driven environment; we should present the evidence at the negotiating table.

Management might not realize that they have a shared purpose with the union—we both strive to provide students with the best learning environment. But when a percentage of the workforce is under-valued in how they're compensated, it looks irrational for the employer to justify low wages, not to mention unethical. There's a term to describe an organization that purports to promote social justice, equity, and fairness as its mandate, but does not practice it—lip service. That kind of virtue signaling by the university to students, alumni, and community needs to be called out. It negatively impacts

the well-being of its contract staff. So, instead of paying lip service, it's time to pay contract instructors what they are worth. Time to give credit where credit is due.

As an instructor I stress equity, fairness, and open-mindedness in my classes. Are those qualities too radical to expect from my employer? When a university begins to reflect the characteristics that we try to develop in our students, then together we can ensure that students reach their goals. What we need is a fair formula.

Teaching from the Margins

Lauren McKenzie, VP for The Language Centre Instructors

The Language Centre (TLC) at Saint Mary's offers English language instruction to a range of students - those who plan to attend courses at SMU, exchange students in partnerships between SMU and foreign higher education institutions, and newcomers who are upgrading their language skills. Currently, TLC has students from Asia, Eastern Europe, Africa, and Latin America. TLC currently has 20 resilient CUPE 3912 members who have experienced significant upheaval and persevered.

The Language Centre is often the first point of contact for international students when they arrive in Halifax. Part of the work of TLC instructors is to welcome students to Canada, make them feel comfortable, and introduce them to academic life at SMU. These instructors are an extremely caring and supportive group of teachers with diverse

academic and cultural backgrounds. In the past two years, TLC's instructors have adapted curriculum and upgraded their skills to maintain high standards and continuity in instruction while experiencing incredible personal and professional challenges.

Course delivery and working conditions at TLC have changed dramatically as a result of the pandemic. Once a bustling language school filled with teachers and students engaged in a wide range of courses, TLC has suffered significant losses in recent years. In 2015, twenty-nine instructors were teaching face-to-face courses including: partnerships with Chinese and Japanese universities; EAP and ESL courses; professional development courses for ESL teachers; special courses for partner schools; courses for university partners including the Sobey

School of Business; and an introduction to TESL course. Today, there are twelve instructors teaching a much reduced catalogue of courses. Many opportunities for our members have disappeared, adding more pressure to instructors experiencing high precarity in their work. Teaching assignments at TLC are generally eight weeks long and based on enrollment and language student numbers are down across the city, region, and industry. The Language Centre saw a significant decrease in student numbers as a result of COVID-19. As a result, many instructors were forced to look for other work, apply for CERB, re-train, retire early, etc.

Due to international travel and local government restrictions, many TLC students were not able to attend classes in person. In March 2020, all classes moved to online delivery and

teachers began emergency remote teaching, characterised by its response to a crisis and reliance on in-person teaching methods (Hodges et al., 2020). Emergency teaching is vastly different from the planned and research-based methods instructors are now using to deliver language instruction to students in face to face, online and hybrid courses.

The students at TLC and language schools all over Canada want an immersive language and cultural experience, thus many chose to defer language studies or explore other forms of delivery when travel and study restrictions presented obstacles. This is a trend in our industry, and language schools and teachers all over the world have had to adapt to a very different teaching context.

Our school, like so many, saw tragedy strike in 2021 when we lost trusted colleagues and dedicated teachers Bruce Hartlin and Jason Doucette. Bruce was a lover of music and the fine arts. He was a lifelong learner and teacher; Bruce taught at TLC for 20 years and had travelled the world making people feel special. Jason Doucette spent 18 years at TLC and had a fierce

sense of humour. He was an active member of CUPE 3912 and a strong voice for members. Bruce and Jason were friends to all at TLC and helped to build the community of language instructors at SMU. They are dearly missed by teachers and students.

After many years of service to his brothers and sisters in CUPE 3912, Dr. Rory Leitch retired from his position in late 2021. Rory navigated TLC's instructors through changes in leadership, curriculum and course delivery. He led members through the turmoil of COVID-19 and passionately defended their rights while providing sound counsel. A sincere thank you to Rory for his dedication and hard work.

The focus of the instructors at TLC is the experience of students and there is discussion of how instructors and students alike experience a sense of othering, like questioning what university services are available to them and how the rules will or will not apply. For example, TLC instructors returned to campus on January 4th, 2022, while all other SMU courses were being delivered online. Members expressed concerns to the employer about returning to

campus weeks before students and faculty. Once again showing their dedication, instructors headed to campus and taught from empty classrooms for three weeks. TLC students have reported that they are not able to access certain products and services, such as the universal bus pass and enhanced support services for full-time students. Despite studying English full-time at TLC, they are not given that status at the university.

The Language Centre acts as a rallying point for students who need connection(s) and instructors who specialise in supporting their academic and social growth. TLC instructors will continue to advocate for equality and inclusiveness for their students and all members of the SMU community.

Lauren McKenzie is the new VP for The Language Centre Instructors and joined CUPE 3912 in 2015.

References

[Hodges, C., et al. \(2020\). *The difference between emergency remote teaching and online teaching*. Educause Review.](#)

Health and Safety Post COVID-19

Troy Winters, Senior Officer, Health and Safety, CUPE National

Jenna Brookfield, Health and Safety Representative, CUPE Atlantic

What will the health and safety world be after COVID-19?

For two years the COVID-19 pandemic has been the dominant topic of occupational health

and safety as public health directed initiatives tried to slow the spread of the disease across our society and through our workplaces. Whether the virus stays with us as an ever-present risk to

be mitigated, or the risk dissipates due to vaccinations, new treatments, and the evolution of the virus, our workplaces and our perspectives on risk have

forever changed and those impacts will leave a lasting legacy on our safety at work.

Rebuild the precautionary principle

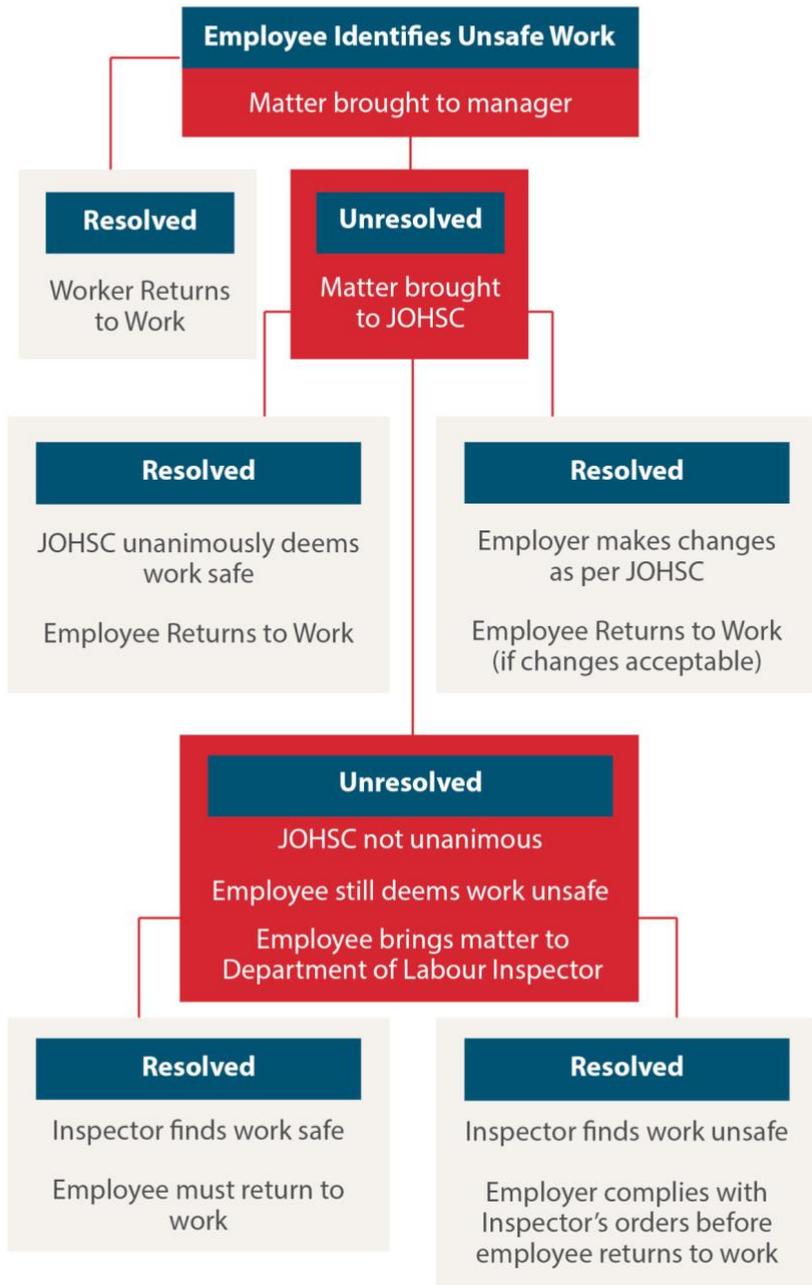
The 2003 SARS outbreak, which killed hundreds, led many in Canada to question the way that workers were left to fend for themselves. An inquiry in Ontario led by Justice Archie Campbell concluded that the most important takeaway from that experience was the adoption of the precautionary principle. Simply stated, the principle is that:

Where there is reasonable evidence of an impending threat to public harm, it is inappropriate to require proof of causation beyond a reasonable doubt before taking steps to avert the threat [...] that reasonable efforts to reduce risk need not await scientific proof.

Did lessons learned from the SARS outbreak help inform Canada's response to the COVID-19 pandemic? In short, the answer is 'no'. Due to a faulty classification of how COVID was being transmitted, the poor application of public health rules in occupational settings, and a supply chain issue of massive proportions, thousands of workers were unnecessarily exposed to COVID-19.

Moving forward, we need to ensure all workers know their rights, know how to refuse work that could put them in danger and that workplaces have effective health and safety committees documenting hazards and making recommendations to ensure that workers are never again exposed to hazards that are completely controllable.

Work Refusal Procedure



How we think about sickness

"If you are sick, stay home." This has become the mantra for workplaces that have continued to

run through the pandemic. However, many CUPE workplaces continued to have attendance management programs that track and unfairly punish work-

ers for taking sick days, even when those sick days have been negotiated into collective agreements. The pandemic showed that by wearing masks and staying home while ill, we could essentially stop the spread of the common seasonal flu. Employers should end all attendance management programs, or we should seek to bargain specific protections against employer actions for using legitimate sick days, especially the ones that have been bargained in lieu of other benefits. Forcing workers to come into work sick (either directly by order, or by the impact of a threatening attendance management programs) only serves to infect more people, causing an even greater impact on the workplace and negatively impacting the physical and mental health of CUPE members, and the public at large that we serve.

Remote work has become more normalized

The majority of CUPE members' jobs cannot be done remotely. However, for those whose work can be performed remotely, there are many considerations. First, for those working at home, employers have the same responsibility for ensuring that

work has been organized in a safe manner. That means developing methods to either remotely perform work assessments, or training workers to assess their own work area for hazards and reporting when there are concerns. Even the best-intentioned workstation design may not be correct for everyone, so training workers to recognize the early signs of repetitive strain injuries is crucial to avoid the development of more severe conditions that may require surgical interventions.

Additionally, not all workers want to remain at home. Domestic situations differ for every worker. Not everyone has the space to set up a home office and going to work can be the only escape for some workers experiencing domestic violence.

Finally, the pandemic should not be used as an excuse for employers to not provide individually, appropriately set up workstations. Many pre-pandemic space saving programs like 'office hotelling' or 'hot desk-ing' and 'cubicle farms' are being pushed to 'provide flexibility' and reduce costs to employers. But these programs often lead to workers having improper work setup, increased noise and

distractions and limited privacy to do their work.

Increased Awareness for Mental Health

One benefit of the past two years has been an acceleration in the focus on psychological health and safety of workers. It should be noted that isolation, and the resulting feelings of loneliness are commonly being reported for workers who have been at home and also for workers who are at work but have lost the ability to socialize with their co-workers because of the necessary restrictions.

Workers should expect that employers ensure that they are adequately supporting their mental health whether they have remained at the workplace or are working from outside. Employers need to start recognizing the importance of a psychologically safe workplace and consider the psychological impacts of work organization (job demands, work autonomy, role, and task clarity etc.), workplace social factors (leadership, relationships, and culture) and the overall workplace hazardous actors (safety of equipment, violence, harassment, and additional hazards).