

BULLETIN

Health care unions baffled by suggestion that accord was secretly negotiated

October 8, 1998

HSA, HEU say they've been lobbying for a rationalized lab system for several years as a way to save \$25 million annually.

The health care unions that represent BC's lab technologists and technicians say the recent accord on lab, breast screening and rehabilitation services could help eliminate the waste and duplication that currently exist in BC's health care system. And they say that the BC Medical Association and private labs were well aware that the health care unions were lobbying for changes.

"Our campaign in support of public labs began more than two years ago," said HSA President Cindy Stewart. "As part of our campaign, we met with officials from the private labs and briefed them on our position. Now suddenly, they claim to have known nothing about it." Stewart added that the details of the accord have been posted on the unions' Web sites for two weeks.

"A potential cost savings of \$25 million a year could go a long way toward keeping our public health care system affordable and sustainable for the future," said Hospital Employees' Union secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt. "If the BCMA is truly concerned about protecting medicare, why are they rejecting an option that would mean more money for hospitals, surgical waitlists and other forms of care?"

Allnutt said that the BCMA's opposition could be linked to the fact that a number of physicians own shares in private laboratories.

Stewart said as a first step, the government has invited the health care unions to participate on a joint committee that will explore ways to maximize the role of public labs. Any changes to the delivery of services would require cabinet approval.

"Clearly the BCMA and the private labs are protecting their own interests," said Stewart. "But the status quo is unacceptable. It would be unfortunate if their self-interest prevented the provincial government from realizing these savings and protecting our health care system for the future."

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