



# **Heart surgery cancellations a clear message that shortages in health science professions can no longer be ignored by BC government**

July 26, 2012

News of heart surgery cancellations in Vancouver this week unfortunately doesn't come as a surprise to the Health Sciences Association of BC, and the union is calling for immediate action by the Ministry of Health to address the shortages responsible for a long-standing and continuing weakness in health authorities' ability to provide critical services for very ill patients.

"HSA has been sounding the alarm about critical shortages of health science professionals ... including clinical perfusionists who are responsible for keeping patients alive during complex heart and lung surgeries ... for several years," said HSA president Reid Johnson.

"The government has failed to address recruitment and retention challenges among clinical perfusionists. As a result, BC's pool of these very specialized health science professionals is critically low. The shortages are taking their toll. In order to meet surgery needs, many of these professionals are working huge amounts of overtime, and they are working at a rate that is simply not sustainable," he said.

"Health authorities are working with what they have, but the ability to recruit enough perfusionists to ensure the service is there when British Columbians need it comes down to these specialized health science professionals having options elsewhere," he said.

By the end of 2013, for example, wages for staff clinical perfusionists in Alberta will be \$11 an hour greater than the hourly wage offered in British Columbia.

"Wages and working conditions are extremely important factors in recruitment of highly sought members of the modern health care team. Higher wage rates, and better staffing ratios that allow perfusionists to have days off and not constantly be on-call are factors that professionals will consider as they make career decisions," he said.

But the challenge is not just in lagging behind in competitive wages and benefits. Training spaces for clinical perfusionists are sorely needed. The two-year education program for clinical perfusionists in British Columbia is run by BCIT, which accepts six students every two years. There are no other training facilities in B.C.

There are only two other programs in Canada: a French language program at the University of Montreal, and the only other English language program at the Michener Institute of Applied Health Sciences in Toronto.

Johnson said the challenges of recruitment and retention that led to this week's cancellations are not limited to clinical perfusionists. The union lobbied government and opposition MLAs earlier this year to raise awareness of the critical shortages.

"At that time, in April, just three of the provinces' health authorities had an immediate need for 326 health science professionals," he said. "Each one of those vacancies represents a delay, and results in suffering for patients and increased cost to the system," he said.

"Increased training spaces, opportunities for clinical practicums, and competitive wages are three critical components for addressing these issues," Johnson said. "These issues can all begin to be addressed at the bargaining table, and health employers need a mandate from the provincial government that allows the flexibility to address these challenges," he said.

HSA represents 16,000 health science professionals in four unions in the Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association. The collective agreement expired March 31, and bargaining is set to resume at the end of August.

[Printer-friendly version](#)

See Vancouver Sun article [here](#).

Type:

[Media Release](#)

Topic:

[Health Science Professionals](#)

- [Print](#)
- [PDF](#)

180 East Columbia  
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website  
[www.hsabc.org](http://www.hsabc.org)

Telephone 604-517-0994  
1-800-663-2017