

BULLETIN

## Health care around the province in dire straits

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**fter six weeks** of meeting with HSA members at regional meetings this fall, I have a very clear, albeit sad, picture of what the Liberal government is doing to communities across the province.

School closures. School transportation safety issues. Pharmacare cuts. Closed and downgraded hospitals. Displaced seniors. Reduced services. Dangerous work loads. Unpaid work. Fear at work.

It's not a pretty picture, as members reported a litany of despair and concerns. It's not what is going to make our health and education systems work or keep our communities viable. It's a plan and practice that is destined to hurt our communities, the services we provide, the people who count on those services, and the people who deliver those services.

I heard the same concerns about the deterioration of the services in every region of the province that I visited. From Victoria to the Kootenays and the North, HSA members are witnessing and experiencing changes in the health and social services they strive so hard to provide. Restructuring and budget cuts have led to fewer services being available and more patients and their families are increasingly anxious about the level of service and care they receive. While the provincial government tries to wipe its hands of responsibility for services in communities, local authorities and facilities are left struggling to meet the needs of their regions with reduced budgets and resources. Members expressed their concern about what this means for the health and well being of people who live in their communities. They are very worried about their ability to continue to maintain the level of services that they want to deliver.

We were told that the emergency department was closed in Lytton, the only hospital on the Trans Canada between Cache Creek and Hope. People were told to use a non-working phone to call 911 for emergency service.

It was difficult to hear that seniors relocated as a result of the closure of their hospital have experienced a higher than expected death rate. Sadly, the trauma of the move has taken a very human toll. As one member so poignantly expressed it: seniors suffer quietly and die sooner.

Members expressed dismay that patients were receiving diagnostic procedures and nursing care openly in hallways because of a lack of beds. Meeting after meeting, the stories, the examples and the concerns were the same. It was like going to the same movie again, and again and again with the same ending.

And what's the effect of all of this? Of understaffing, escalating workloads and poor morale? Of management whose hands are tied by the impossible fiscal demands of a government bent on strangling our health care system?

HSA members are leaving. The health science professionals who provide the diagnostic, clinical and rehabilitation services that British Columbians need are leaving. They are leaving the province; they are leaving their professions.

And the result? The shortages that have plagued many of our professions for the past several years are getting worse. For those that remain, the workloads are becoming impossible. Burn-out and injury are inevitable.

Alarm bells? Yes.

I urge every HSA member to ring those alarm bells in each of your communities. Your MLA has to hear the stories that I have heard this past month. Your MLA is accountable to their constituents. She or he has to answer to you for the effects their government's policies are having on you, your family, your friends and your community. Ask the questions. Demand the answers. 

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