

BULLETIN

Union will protect members' rights during new round of lab reorgs

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ast fall, HSA was deeply involved with yet another provincial review of laboratory services. At that time, I shared with you my skepticism about the process, but said the union was willing to give it a try because we have consistently advocated for review of the system to make it better.

Since then, HSA has continued to stay involved in the Ministry of Health-led review. I have met with consultants, government representatives and Minister of Health Services Colin Hansen to continue to pursue the areas we believe must be considered to achieve an integrated, cost-effective and modernized system.

This summer, the government released the findings of its review and took immediate steps to implement reforms. Major steps in the reform process include:

1. Reducing the medical laboratory out-patient fee schedule by eight per cent in September 2003 and 12 per cent in April 2004;
2. Establishing a Provincial Lab Coordinating Office (PLCO);
3. Consolidating funding for all lab services into a single budget and transferring control of this budget to individual Health Authorities by 2005; and
4. Requiring each Health Authority to conduct a competitive bidding process to determine who will provide outpatient testing in the region.

The Provincial Laboratory Coordinating Office has been established to oversee the province-wide reforms. Its mandate is to ensure the bidding process for outpatient testing is conducted fairly, as well as provide advice on issues such as quality, standardization, information services, academic concerns, human resource planning and labour relations.

I have met with the PLCOs senior managers to discuss several of these issues, and will continue to raise the concerns of HSA members in our role as a member of the advisory committees. As well, several HSA medical laboratory technologists will be providing their clinical expertise through the clinical advisory committees being set up by the PLCO.

At the same time that the provincial review of out-patient lab services was underway, several of the Health Authorities embarked upon significant restructuring reforms on a region by region basis. Dealing with their own cost pressures, they were no longer able to wait for a provincial approach and many have initiated their own reforms. Understandably, all this activity has exacerbated what are already stressful working conditions for many technologists.

There is no doubt that these are significant reforms and that the provision of medical laboratory services is going to change. HSA members have not been averse to reforming laboratory services if the stated objective is the real objective ... the provision of quality lab services. Unfortunately, we have seen our share of reform initiatives be driven by unrealistic and expedient cost savings, too often at the expense of workers.

I urge HSA members to keep our office informed of the lab reorganizations occurring in their regions and facilities. We need to know what impact the planned restructuring is having on members and the patients who depend on the services. HSA is committed to representing our members on this critical issue and will continue to play a central role, at the provincial, regional and local level. 

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