

## Shortages in idyllic setting make for a hectic pace

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**ts a bucolic setting** and so remote: by the urban standards of most Canadians, it would seem working a shift in Queen Charlotte Islands Hospital would be a cakewalk.

Derek Barton Chief steward & X-ray technologist Queen Charlotte Islands Hospital
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Not so, says Derek Barton. The x-ray technologist at the hospitals Queen Charlotte City site has worked as long as four months straight, a result of limited staff numbers and the islands dual roles in industry and tourism.

-Were on call 24/7," says Barton. -There are many times when we work a month straight. There are times when we feel like were sicker than the patient were x-raying."

There have traditionally been two x-ray technologists on the northern island: Barton in Queen Charlotte City, and a colleague further north in Masset, at the former Canadian Forces hospital. And more help is on the way. -We just have hired a new person, so were hoping to get at least one week in a month off now," Barton said.

Barton, who was born and educated in Ontario, is chief steward for HSA members at the hospital. He stepped into the position when the former steward moved off-island. He said being a steward where he works is relatively easy. -Since were such a small group and everybody knows everybody, including management, we can always seem to work it out."

Bartons workplace is a 21-bed hospital, eight of these acute care and the rest long-term. The hospital serves approximately 5,000 permanent residents of the island, and twice as many people in the summer.

-Some weekends can go by without ever getting called in." Other times, he doesnt get a weekend at all. Chest x-rays are the most common, but the islands large logging and fishing communities, as well as the adventure tourism industry, generate accidents.

Barton grew up in the farming community of Winchester, Ont., a town of 1,200 ... about the size of the one in which he now resides. As he recalls, hed always wanted to be an x-ray technologist. -As a child, I was always hurting myself on the farm," he jokes. He took over the position in the Charlottes in 1999 after filling in for a colleague who subsequently found a job elsewhere. Despite the bouts of long hours and the isolation, he has no plans to move.

The HSA membership at the hospital has recently grown to about 20 members from a previous 11, as the

Northern Health Authority has added counselling and infant development programs. Still, there are cuts that add to the workload of staff already putting in long hours.

Staff, particularly in northern areas, are constantly on-call ... making it difficult to schedule meetings. Barton had to miss this years HSA convention because he had to work. And cutbacks in support positions held by HEU members adds stress to the job. -Weve lost our stores manager, who used to do the ordering and billing for the department."

Workers at Queen Charlotte Hospital already multi-task, Barton said. -I had to learn how to perform electrocardiograms, I had to do casting, a lot of stuff you dont learn in official x-ray training.

-And being a small department, we have to do our own scanning of films, maintenance and billing ... all the office duties."

Despite performing those duties, which can take a half an hour per case, management does not recognize such work. -Thats why we havent been able to hire our third tech, because our stats dont reflect the work we do. Its a bit unfair," Barton says.

Technology at Queen Charlottes is a mix of old and new. Computers help with the vast distances that separate the work sites. Barton and his colleague in Massett scan x-ray film and e-mail them to a radiologist in Terrace. The turnaround time can still pose challenges, however, and in emergency situations doctors on the Charlottes must sometimes perform a -wet read" ... basically an educated guess.

Barton sits on his hospitals occupational health and safety and Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) committees, and has himself contributed to technological upgrade. With the aid of a Vancouver firm, he set up on-line training for WHMIS, thereby cutting the cost of flying up instructors.

He helped search for new, more effective pagers and aided in the acquisition of satellite phones. -And were finally receiving portable x-ray machines here." Without that technology, he said, -you could never take your machine into the ER. We always had to bring the patient to the machine, and sometimes they cant be moved."

People on the Charlottes are -a very welcoming bunch," notes Barton, and staff in the various health care unions all get along. Once a month theres a potluck lunch on site, which makes for -a very good work environment. We help each other out." 

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