

BULLETIN

## Many changes for members at Canadian Blood Services

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by BONNIE PHILLIPS



**recently visited** the Canadian Blood Services with the goal of investigating the current state of affairs with the pending closure of the testing laboratory, originally slated for April 2004 but recently moved forward to September 2003. As region 5s elected representative on HSAs board of directors, I felt I needed to understand what the implications were for our members and, as a member of the general public, I wished to understand what the implications were for the citizens of BC.

BC and the Yukon have only one main center for collecting, processing, testing and labelling blood while other provinces have two or more centers. This to me seems ludicrous as the Center in BC handles the second-highest volume of blood in Canada. Canadian Blood Services is highly regulated in the manufacturing of blood products, being treated with the same scrutiny and regulations as drug companies.

When blood is donated, sample vials of blood are also taken; these samples are sent for testing for a variety of transmittable diseases. The donated blood is separated into concentrated red cells, platelets and plasma. The concentrated red cells are storable for 45 days although platelets store for only five days. Plasma, however, can be stored for longer as it can be frozen. Currently, donated blood is collected and the next day the samples are tested. On the third day the blood is ready for dispensing to hospitals and by that time the platelets have only two days left before they are unusable. As I understand it, the future plan is for blood samples to be sent to Calgary for testing and by doing this, the window of time for platelets becomes very short. It is conceivable that we may have platelets here but be unable to use them, because the testing has been delayed. This is worrisome to me should there be a mass emergency in BC.

HSA, until recently, had 92 members working at Canadian Blood Services. Fifty of these members worked in the testing laboratory, and will be displaced by September 2003. Several have left Canadian Blood Services, making a decision to find employment elsewhere. Some blood testing has recently been moved to Toronto due to the current low staffing levels in the lab, thus causing ten premature displacements.

The remaining members have been putting in long hours to keep the laboratory operational, and also working to upgrade the computer systems link with Calgary for the future testing to be done there. Employees are working nine-hour shifts, plus overtime, and they also have been coming in on their scheduled days off; understandably, these members are becoming -burned out." Many of these members are long-term employees who care about maintaining testing services in BC for as long as possible.

The severance package is one weeks pay for every two years of employment. However, an employee needs to have worked for more than ten years to qualify. Some incentives have been negotiated to retain employees until the closure, but the main issue of enhanced severance was quashed by HEABC due to Bill 29.

In summary, I would like to express my dismay regarding the situation at Canadian Blood Services. I worry about possible blood shortages in the future and am concerned for members struggling to maintain the testing services before it is moved out of province.

Restructuring and uncertainty has become a way of life for people working in health care, and this is just one of the examples of the impact that is having on HSA members. 

*Bonnie Phillips is a recreation therapist at Vancouver Community Mental Health. She represents Region 5 on HSAs Board of Directors.*

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180 East Columbia  
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

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

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