

## Turning passion into action

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by MIRIAM SOBRINO



**usan Hearsey** describes herself as "boring." She's a physiotherapist who loves the work. She eats, sleeps and breathes physiotherapy. She takes physiotherapy books and magazines with her for holiday reading.

Susan Hearsey Chief Physiotherapist Burnaby General Hospital
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But dig a little deeper and you learn that Hearsey is far from boring. She is passionate. And her passion drives her to take on a job and do it well. This is not a woman who gets involved unless she knows she's going to give it everything she can.

She was born in Hong Kong, where her father was serving in the armed forces. Her family settled in Yorkshire, England when the three children were school-aged. And from those early years, she dreamed of going to Canada. She chose physiotherapy as a career because she wanted to help people and, as it turned out, physios were in great demand. Soon after completing her training, she fulfilled her ambition to move to Canada by landing a job here.

It's Hearsey's passion for her patients and the work she does that makes her an effective advocate.

A few years ago, she got interested in continence issues. Her interest and determination led to the development of a continence clinic at Burnaby General Hospital. It took hard work and dedication to bring the specialized clinic to fruition. She studied a similar clinic at Vancouver Women's and Children's Hospital, threw herself into learning more, grant application writing, and research until she succeeded in getting the clinic up and running. Today, patients suffering from varying degrees of continence problems have a place to go to deal with a health issue that is also a social stigma. These patients — mostly women — range in age from 20 to 90 years old.

A chief steward at Burnaby General in the mid 1980s for a few months, she rekindled her involvement in HSA recently when the Liberal government delisted several services from the Medical Services Plan.

She went into action shortly after the services were cut. She was seeing a woman who was waiting for a hip replacement, and in the interim was receiving regular outpatient physiotherapy services to manage the pain she was in.

"Then I looked at the cuts, and I thought — what about all the other patients that aren't even getting treatment? A lot of people can't afford to go privately."

She made an appointment with her MLA, Harry Bloy. Loaded with information and experience with her 20-plus years as a physiotherapist, she made the case to him.

“He sat and listened. He spent an hour and 20 minutes with me. Then I followed up with a letter that reiterated my points. He later dropped in to see me in the hospital. I showed him around, showed him the waiting list and he asked me “how can we get you more staff?””

Her experience tells her she can’t expect to see new staff streaming in the door any time soon, but she knows that she has made a small contribution to getting the decision-makers to understand health funding is important – and the people who provide the health care services our communities depend on are desperately needed.

Her success with getting her message to her MLA helped convince her it was time to take some action on other issues affecting health care workers.

This summer, Hearsey joined a number of other HSA members at a training session for union members interested in promoting information about changes to Workers’ Compensation and the related occupational health and safety issues for health care workers.

She is encouraging members at Burnaby Hospital to get informed about the changes and to do something about it.

“If individuals don’t speak out and let their thoughts be known about issues/actions that will adversely affect them or others, then every single one of us will ultimately be worse off. It has been said that one letter written to lobby a cause reflects the opinion of 1,000 people,” she says in an article she has circulated to HSA members at the hospital.

Over the years, Hearsey has learned to appreciate the power of the pen.

A strong advocate of animal rights, she has written letters, signed petitions and gathered signatures for petitions for organizations promoting protection against animal abuse. For Hearsey, it’s not a big stretch going from advocacy for pets to advocacy for people.

“When you’re helping animals, you’re helping people. Animals bring such compassion and peace to people,” she said. 

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