

BULLETIN

Health care needs your help

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by LOIS DICK



ay you live in interesting times" has traditionally been considered a curse; if we didnt understand why, we do now!

Since the 1970s, health care in British Columbia has undergone constant budgetary cutbacks and continual restructuring ... and we are not done yet! Here in the North we have been lucky (so far) to have a Health Authority that has taken the time to assess the needs of our area. Given the geographical complexity, I dont think they had a choice.

Here are some facts about Region 10:

â€¢ we work in the area administered by the Northern Health Authority

â€¢ approximately 950 HSA members from all types of disciplines and worksites work in Region 10

â€¢ geographically, we make up two thirds of the province

â€¢ our geography includes mountains, foothills, oceanfront, islands, river valleys, lakes and plains

â€¢ our population is approximately 250,000 to 300,000 including cities, small towns and rural areas

â€¢ 70 per cent of the economy of British Columbia comes from the rural areas.

So far, I have not heard about any facility closures in Region 10, though I do know we have had some shuffling of resources. I have also been assured that the Northern Health Authority will consult with the union if any closures are contemplated. I hope that a good working relationship will be continued for our region.

Health care workers have lived through a year like no other in our history. From job action to legislated contracts, health care workers have persevered under increased workloads and an uncertain future.

The government has shown a lack of respect for all health care workers when they legislated our contracts and when then chose to reward one professional group of workers over another. These inequities will foster future discord and contribute to shortages in some of our professions. Students in the process of choosing a career are likely to choose the one that makes \$10,000 more per year. The government showed a woeful lack of vision in the actions they took in the summer of 2001. Our members will be paying for that lack in the decades to come.

As health care workers, we must be ever vigilant if we are to keep what we have and protect our public health care system. Through our national affiliation with NUPGE, our union is participating in the Canada-wide campaign to save our public health care system. This campaign was a highlight of the Canadian Labour Congress Convention held in Vancouver in June. It is very apparent that health care is the number one issue for many Canadians.

At the grassroots level, we must take every opportunity to speak about the benefits of our public health care

system. Did you know that in the United States there are about 45 million Americans who are not covered by medical insurance of any kind? Yet, their system, with its privatization etc., costs \$9,100 per person per year. In Canada, where all people are covered, medicare costs \$3,100 per person per year. It doesnt take long to realize that the -money" excuse is not to be believed.

Privatization is not a long-term or sound solution to health care restructuring. A good book to read on this subject is Caring for Profit by Colleen Fuller. It is an eye-opener about our Canadian system.

Our increasing workloads and non-stop change cause a major challenge to our stress management. Take the time to be kind to yourself, co-workers, friends and family. Remember to practice all the Occupational Health and Safety rules. It is too easy to cut corners when we are all rushed. It only takes that one moment to have an accident but it takes a lifetime to wish you hadnt.

Look after yourselves and each other. Nurture what is good and stand together. Make no mistake ... this is a war where the loss will be devastating to future generations, and to ourselves. Every day we must continue to voice our concerns, and keep the public informed about our fight to keep our health care system public and equally available to everyone. I keep my MLAs phone number at work and at home and I use it often.

One person makes a difference ... and a -union" of people can change the world. 

Lois Dick is the new Region 10 representative on HSAs Board of Directors.

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