

BULLETIN

## Liberal government and HEABC responsible for industry instability

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by RON OHMART



**he Liberal government** has been running a television advertising campaign on health care for the past month. In one of the ads, you see a doctor going into an empty operating room.

It's not a reassuring image, because you can't see a patient on the table, there are no health care professionals in the room and there's a lack of equipment in sight. It's as though the doctor is walking into a system that's been starved. The health care workers have been displaced, the equipment has broken down and hasn't been replaced, and the patient can't afford the increasing costs of being sick in British Columbia.

That's the direction in which the Liberal plan for health care is headed, and not the one we're acting now so your health care system will be there for you. The direction their ads want us to believe.

HSA and the other health care unions are clearly opposed to the Liberal vision for health care in British Columbia since the introduction of Bill 29 and the restructuring of the health care system early this year.

In the area of labour relations, with hundreds of health care workers already laid off, and more to come, the unions have been working to protect the rights of displaced employees through expanded seniority lists. A decision issued by the Labour Relations Board August 16 expands those seniority lists, creating slightly improved options for employees who are displaced due to restructuring, downsizing and outright closures.

While this small victory greatly improved options for displaced workers, it opened the door for a new generation of problems and the creation of new inequities. While displaced employees now have more options to find alternative work, employees who have jobs are barred from applying for jobs that are open only to displaced workers.

Situations like this will repeat themselves over and over again as long as Bill 29 exists. As long as there is a legislative hammer that disregards years and decades of labour relations practices in the health care field, health care workers and the people they take care of are going to suffer.

The Liberal government is not the only culprit.

Even with Bill 29 in place, HEABC could have helped mitigate the resulting chaos in health care. But they refused.

When the new Health Authorities were established it was clear from the beginning that the Health Authorities had huge challenges to meet the budgetary demands imposed by the Liberal government. Recognizing the

difficult situation they were in I, along with HSA President Cindy Stewart, invited the Health Authorities to discuss the challenges associated with restructuring and work with us proactively to develop constructive solutions.

HSA has a long history of working with local employers to find creative solutions to difficult labour relations issues. Our invitation stands, and as Health Authorities now work to meet the requirements set out by the Labour Board, I invite them again to work with us to create solutions that work for employees as well as employers.

As an agent representing employers, HEABC has erected obstacle after obstacle to thwart efforts by local employers and by unions to develop a labour relations climate that works for employers, employees and, most importantly, the patients we serve.

While HEABC and the government continue on a campaign to destabilize relations between the front line health care workers and their employers, we will continue to work to find solutions that allow for healthy working relationships and smooth labour relations with our direct employers.

The future is not bright for health care in British Columbia. User fees have been introduced that make it increasingly difficult for patients with modest incomes to receive critical preventative and rehabilitation services. Health authorities and hospitals are under incredible pressure to save costs, and the result is important services are being cut.

And this is just after one year.

HSA will continue to work on a number of fronts  in the courts, with local employers, with other unions and local community organizations throughout the province  to protect our members and the health care services you provide.

*Ron Ohmart is HSA's Executive Director of Labour Relations.*

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