

BULLETIN

Health professional shortage demands immediate action

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The shortage of health professionals has reached a crisis point in many BC communities. This problem was recently highlighted in Prince George where physicians and specialists have sounded the alarm about shortages in their field. However, as HSA members know, the problems are beyond the narrow perspective of any one professional discipline.

Skilled professionals have many choices today ... choices that may take them to another community, province or even another country. For this reason, it is important that we examine the factors that influence the recruitment and retention of qualified health professionals, not only in rural communities but province-wide.

It is naïve to think that immediate and lasting solutions can be implemented overnight. There are multiple factors that have led us here and a quick fix will not solve the problem ... particularly a fix designed under political pressure or under the glare of the media spotlight.

Solutions must be multifaceted and they need to address the short term as well as long term. Young people have many career choices these days and with the constant attention to the crisis in health care, it is not surprising that young people are turning away from health professions. Add to this problem, declining working conditions, increased injury rates and no meaningful wage increase for close to a decade, and it's no wonder that the problem has become so severe.

While tuition freezes at universities have been heralded as a benefit for students, the government has not provided additional funding to make up for the loss. Consequently post-secondary institutions have been forced to curtail if not reduce training seats. We are now seeing the effects of these cuts in pharmacy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and lab technology. It is important that we have timely information about these trends to track the status of health professionals in the system and to better predict and mitigate the inevitable cycles of over- and under-supply.

In addition, we need to remind young people that there are many career options in health care besides being a doctor or nurse. HSA represents over 100 different professional disciplines that are critical to the provision of comprehensive services, all of which provide limitless opportunities for new grads.

Finally, health care will continue to produce front-page headlines if there is not a solid commitment to restore federal funding to sustainable levels. It is completely unrealistic to remove 40 billion from the system and expect that there will be no impact on services.

In the months ahead, HSA will be initiating a campaign to draw attention to these issues and their impact on the shortages of paramedical professionals. Watch for more information about the campaign in upcoming issues of *The Report* and on your union notice board. As we gear up for the next round of bargaining, we must

deliver a strong message that in order to recruit and retain highly trained health professionals, we must have working conditions and wages that actually reflect our worth.

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