

## Representing HSA members takes many forms

October 1, 1999

### The Report: October / November 1999 vol.20 num.3

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In recent years, government relations has become an important part of representing the interests of HSA members.

Whether it is meeting with Ministers, ministry officials or MLAs, we have recognized that it is vital that decision-makers are educated about HSA, our membership and our priority issues. While it takes time and resources to do this effectively, I have found that by choosing our issues carefully and doing our homework in presenting a rational and reasonable case, HSA has been able to influence some very important public policy issues in recent months.

In past issues of The Report, we have told you about the on-going debate over the interpretation of Bill 28, the Health Authorities Amendment Act. Specifically, this related to a dispute over which union has the right to represent clinical perfusionists. After the Labour Relations Board ruled in favour of HSA's interpretation in February, HEU began an active lobbying campaign directed at government MLAs urging them to amend the legislation to reflect the interpretation they favoured. At that time, the HSA Board of Directors felt we had no choice but respond. Regional Directors met with as many MLAs as possible to present HSA's perspective on this issue and urge them to leave the matter in the hands of the Labour Relations Board. So far, our efforts have been successful. As the recent legislative session was winding down, we received word that the government was not planning to amend the legislation.

In July, we learned that the Capital Health Region planned to implement budget cuts that would have devastated out-patient rehabilitation therapy services in the region. We contacted the Ministry of Health and explained how these cuts would impact both patients services and the workers who provide those services. Both here in the office and throughout excellent stewards in Victoria, we vigorously fought against the cuts and in the end, we were successful. Only weeks ago, the health board announced that there would be no cuts to out-patient rehab services.

While these stories do not make it into the newspapers, it is important that members know about them. Successfully representing HSA members can take many forms, not all that are readily apparent. But, our recent experience does tell us that done well, and for the right issues, good government relations is an essential strategic element in doing the job.

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