

BULLETIN

## Looking back: founding HSA member wins big at end of rewarding career

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In 1971, Pat Holisky was instrumental in the formation of HSA as a union to represent the rights of paramedical professionals in the workplace. Twenty-eight years later ... as she retires ... HSA was able to pay back a big debt of gratitude, with a significant settlement of a longstanding policy grievance.

Holisky was one of the many laboratory technologists affected by the bitter lab restructuring process at Vancouver Hospital during the past two years. Vancouver Hospital sought to eliminate most of the mid-grade levels for lab techs, and institute a greatly reduced classifications system.

Suddenly, Holisky found herself doing the job of a head tech but only being paid at grade 3 ... fully two grades below what the union assessed she should be receiving.

In January, HSA and Vancouver Hospital reached a settlement supporting the position taken by Holisky and many other supervisory laboratory technologists at Vancouver Hospital. "All areas of the lab are constantly changing, which makes it so important to have skilled people who are involved and interested in their fields of study," Holinsky explains. "There's always new instrumentation, and better scientific understanding. And you can't treat people like they're machines."

The settlement is particularly significant for Holisky as a retiring employee. "All my severance and related payouts are based on my last year's salary, so they had to recalculate and upgrade all my payouts," she said. "That was a real plus. And my pension will be adjusted accordingly as well ... and that's money I will be getting for the rest of my life."

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As a young laboratory technologist, Pat Holisky was drawn to the complex and specialized field of hematology. Even after a few months of a rich retired life, she brightens as she talks about her life's work. "My first love is hematology," she says, "and especially hemostasis ... that's to do with coagulation and blood clotting. Vancouver Hospital is a reference centre for BC, so all the special and more complex hemophiliac cases come here for treatment. I love hematology... and if you really wanted to do complex and special work, Vancouver Hospital was the place to go when I was starting out, and it still is."

Holisky is emphatic about the value of experienced health care workers and the service only they are able to provide. -Our cases weren't just file numbers to us," she said. -There are some hemophiliacs I've known now for thirty years ... they've grown from children into young men. I know them. Even in larger organizations like Vancouver Hospital, the patients still have faces and names."

She says laboratory workers ... including all the co-workers she left behind at VH ... can't be valued enough. -There are so many skilled and committed people at the VH lab," she said. -The laboratory is not just a processing plant. It's people. It's people taking care of people, and losing sight of that would be just terrible and unconscionable."

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Holisky was the executive secretary of the BC branch of the Canadian Society of Laboratory Technologists when, in 1971, talks began of forming a new union of paramedical professionals. -It was clear that we needed to be unionized to negotiate effectively for lab techs, and the other paramedical groups were all in the same situation we were," she said.

-I'm so proud of HSA. It's grown from an organization set up and initially run by volunteers to a very well organized and respected union. And certainly in the beginning we had no idea that it would mature in the manner that it has."

She said she is especially proud of HSA's legacy in enforcing women's rights in the workplace. -I remember during the sixties in some laboratories, men would be paid more than women would," she said.

Holisky added that she wanted HSA as a newly formed organization to help change employers' attitudes towards women as workers. -The vast majority of lab and other hospital workers in the sixties and seventies were young women. The hospital used to consider themselves lucky if a young woman stayed five years before getting married and giving up her job to raise children. But this was changing and they needed to realize that.

-So I consider myself almost a new breed of woman," she laughs, -I've worked for 36 years without an interruption. I'm probably among the first of my kind."

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