

BULLETIN

Accord reached on laboratory, rehab and breast cancer screening services

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In 1996, HSA launched a major campaign calling on the provincial government to enhance the role of public providers in the delivery of laboratory services.

Finally, it seems the government is ready to act.

On September 4, 1998, HSA's Director of Labour Relations Rick Lampshire signed a *Public Sector Accord on Strengthening BC's Public Health Care Services*. The other signatories are the government's chief public sector accord negotiator Tony Penikett and HEU business manager Chris Allnutt.

The accord focuses on enhancing the role of public providers in three areas of the health care system: laboratory services, breast cancer screening, and rehabilitation services and programs for clients of the Workers Compensation Board and the Insurance Corporation of British Columbia.

"We're pleased that the provincial government has opened the door for discussion," says HSA President Cindy Stewart. "Of course, what's more important is whether this process leads to any substantial change in delivery of services. And that will depend on whether the political will exists to implement real change."

As a first step, HSA has been invited to participate on a joint union/Ministry of Health policy committee that will advise government on issues identified in the accord. The committee will meet no less than four times annually. Every six months the chair will alternate between the ministry and the unions, with Cindy Stewart assuming the first chair.

Any substantive changes to the delivery of lab services or breast cancer screening will require Cabinet approval.

As a basis for discussion, the accord recommends that government seriously examine the introduction of a new block-funding system with the following elements:

- Health authorities would be provided with the funding for all laboratory services in their geographic area.
- Health authorities would be given the authority to determine the number and location of outpatient and inpatient laboratory facilities including collection stations.
- Health authorities could be expected to rationalize the provision of laboratory services and capture the

savings potential from technological change.

As a condition of the new funding, health authorities would be required to plan and manage diagnostic services in a manner consistent with Section 3 of the *Health Authorities Act*. The accord says -specifically, this means giving preference to the provision of services through the public sector and ensuring optimal utilization of existing and future public investment in laboratory services." This principle would also apply to any future changes to breast cancer screening.

The other part of the health care system covered by this accord is rehabilitation services for WCB and ICBC clients. Currently, a high percentage of rehab services for ICBC and WCB clients is delivered by private providers. This is largely due to the significant downsizing of rehab services in acute-care hospitals. As part of the accord process, ICBC has indicated a willingness to explore partnerships with HSA, regional health boards and community health councils to provide a variety of rehab services to their clients. Similarly, the WCB has expressed interest in partnering with public health care facilities to provide rehab services to injured workers.

-For years, HSA has lobbied the government to seriously examine the waste and duplication that exists in health care," says Stewart. -Our members know that significant changes are necessary to keep our public health care systems sustainable for the future."

Stewart says she strongly supports the recommendations put forward by the accord negotiators and looks forward to participating on the joint committee to ensure these recommendations are put into action.

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