

BULLETIN

Health ministry facing challenge with departure

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by CINDY STEWART



n the day that Gordon Campbell visited Surrey with an announcement of a new-outpatient centre" to augment health care services in that city ...widely speculated to be the most bold introduction of private healthcare into our system ...the governments strongest and most effective advocate for thoughtful, managed and successful public health care reform threw in the towel.

Dr. Penny Ballem, B.C.s deputy minister of health for the past five years, took the job when Campbell assured her that her vision for a strong, healthy public health care system would not be compromised in the job.

Ballems departure June 22 is a blow to B.C.s health care system. Where the Liberal politicians pushed for quick and dirty answers to a health care system in chaos, Ballems insightful leadership was making inroads. The hip replacement initiative at UBC Hospital, which worked to dramatically address wait lists in the public system ... instead of surrendering to relentless pressure from profit-driven private clinics ... was making a dent in waiting lists.

In the face of a growing crisis in emergency rooms around the province, the Liberals threw money at the problem to try to make it go away. Ballem took the money and ran ... with a refreshingly pro-active approach, establishing swat teams of front-line health care professionals tasked with finding the solutions that Cindy Stewart, HSA President would work for their particular situations.

Ballem is a sophisticated thinker with a deep understanding of the system. She was committed to finding solutions within a system that, as many have said, is a good system that needs a concerted commitment to modernizing and updating to meet the increasingly complex demands for health care delivery.

In her five years as deputy minister of health, she established lines of communication and accountability that were designed to challenge local stewards of health care reform ... the health authorities and individuals working in the system ... to work collaboratively to reform the system.

As the leader of a union representing health science professionals who deliver diagnostic, clinical and rehabilitation services to British Columbians, I have always respected Ballems fundamental understanding that our health care system is a complex one that depends on the whole health care team to address patients health care needs. It takes that level of understanding to tackle the tremendous task of overhauling delivery to ensure British Columbians have access to fair and effective health care.

On the morning she resigned, Ballem addressed the Victoria Minerva Foundations Women Speaker Series

featuring -remarkable women to inspire you with stories and insights into the decisions and events that shaped their lives."

Dr. Penny Ballem is indeed a remarkable woman.

The challenge for the Liberal government will be to find as remarkable a successor who will stand up as Ballem did to the many forces and interests in health care ...politicians included ... to steer the province forward to a system that best serves all British Columbians. 

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180 East Columbia
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website
www.hsabc.org

Telephone 604-517-0994
1-800-663-2017