

BULLETIN

## Founding member leaves legacy of passion and dedication

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**Kit Farrar, a dietitian** who helped start the Health Sciences Association in the early 1970s, died August 14, 2006 aged 91. She served as HSAs first president and executive director.

Farrar was born October 16, 1915 in Sutherland, a small town northwest of Saskatoon. Her parents, who emigrated from Scotland, wanted their two children to have a better life than they had had, and education was a priority for the family. They were steeped in a life that valued education, compassion and hard work.

But hard work didnt always yield the desired results. An excellent student, Kit graduated from the University of Saskatchewan with her brother Nat at just 20 years old. Nat was able to continue on into medical school, but Kit was too young to be accepted into the school.

While disappointed she couldnt pursue her dream of becoming a doctor, she couldnt wait for her age to catch up to the requirements of the time, and moved onto the University of Manitoba, where she earned a degree in dietetics.

Both Kit and her brother Nat did their parents proud. Nat became a doctor and worked as the head of the ENT Department at Shaughnessy Hospital from 1976 to 1988, and was president of the BC Medical Association in 1968. In 1977 he received The Queen Elizabeth Jubilee Medal for his contributions to the medical profession.

Following her university graduation, Kit worked as a dietitian for several years until she married Phil Farrar in 1945. Daughter Lesley and son Blair followed.

While the times would dictate that Kit should stay home to raise her family, Phil suffered from tuberculosis, and Kits career was needed to support the family. She worked as a dietitian at hospitals throughout the Lower Mainland while raising her children and caring for Phil.

Farrar became involved with HSA in the early 1970s, when she was working as a dietitian at Lions Gate Hospital. The Hospital Employees Union had started an organizing drive to get health science professionals to join that union.

At the time, the health science professionals were concerned about joining a union that didnt seem to them to reflect the interests and concerns of professionals like dietitians, social workers, medical record librarians, pharmacists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers and X-ray and laboratory technologists.

So they began to organize.

Farrar was at the front of the line, and became a representative from the dietitians professional association to the Health Sciences Association, and was soon president of the Health Sciences Association, when it was certified in 1971 as the bargaining agent for health science professionals in hospitals. It was her persistence in the formative months of the association that resulted in the creation of local chapters.

Kit Farrar (1915-2006) Dietitian, Lions Gate Hospital HSAs first president & executive director
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Diane Allan was a young dietitian at Lions Gate Hospital in 1970. She recalls Farrars determination to form a union of professionals. Farrar, who was nearing retirement age, brought a spark to the professionals organizing efforts, and was persuaded to hold off retirement to, first act as president and later ... from 1971 to 1975 ... to take on the job of HSAs Executive Director.

-She had energy to spare," recalls Allan, who continues to work at Lions Gate.

-She didnt take anything from anybody and yet she was able to get along with everybody• I remember very vividly her energy and her absolute determination."

Those characteristics served Farrar and HSA well. The early days of forming HSA and fighting off an aggressive campaign by HEU to organize the health professionals into HEU forced those professionals to make some decisions about how they wanted to be represented in the workplace.

On January 14, 1972 her persistence paid off when the Association gave formal notice to the B.C. Hospitals Association to commence collective bargaining. By that time, HSA was certified to represent health science professionals in 28 facilities around the province.

By April of that year, negotiations had begun, and while HSAs first lawyer and chief negotiator John Baigent worked at the bargaining table to achieve an agreement, Farrar was focused on building the budding unions capacity.

In an April 10, 1972 newsletter, reporting in her capacity as president of the Executive Council, Farrar was blunt about the financial situation in communicating to members the decision to assess union dues at \$5 per month, and \$10 per month in hospitals where HSA was not certified. -The Association is, frankly, concerned about its financial situation. The proposed budget for 1972 involves expenditures totaling \$45,760.00. Our present bank balance is \$7,246.34."

Maureen Whelan, hired as HSAs first field officer in October 1971, recalled in a September 1981 interview with The Report the commitment it took to start the new union with Farrar: -• we were totally devoted to it, it was our whole lives for those couple of years."

By May 1972, HSAs first collective agreement was negotiated. The union also had a constitution in place, which included a "no-strike clause.

At a service for Farrar held at Sharon United Church in Langley August 18, Sylvia Mountain, a former chief technologist at Eagle Ridge Hospital, recalled her role in HSAs first collective agreement. Farrar, she said, was driven by her determination that patient care was paramount. She also recognized the importance that members attached to the no-strike clause, even while she recognized that in the long run that clause would serve to handcuff future negotiators.

While the no-strike clause was eradicated at the 1975 annual general meeting, -Kits patient care determination remains the ethos of HSA," Mountain said.

At her service, daughter Lesley Baker recalled her mother had faced adversity throughout her life, and rose to the challenge time after time.

-She lived a long life. Not an easy life."

One of those times of adversity came during her leadership of HSA. In 1974, husband Phil was very ill in the hospital, and was in a coma. At the height of that bout of illness, son Blair, who was due to graduate from UBC in a matter of days, died suddenly of meningitis.

Despite the personal tragedy, Farrar saw the union through to the end of 1975, when Jack Campbell, who had acted as assistant executive director, took over.


As the introduction to the interview with Farrar in the October 1981 issue of The Report says, -some people question if there would be an HSA today, if there had been no Kit Farrar."

While the intense HSA chapter of her life closed, Farrars work was not done. That same year, her first grandchild was born and she moved into the active role of fulltime grandmother. Her devotion to her family is evident in the love and admiration expressed by her daughter and son-in-law Lesley and Ken Baker, and grandchildren Jeremy, Travis and Katie at her August service.

-Of all the things she had done in her life, (her grandchildren) was what most satisfied her," said Ken Baker.

But as her grandchildren grew older and needed her time less, Farrar kept her famous energy going.

At the age of 86, already an active longtime member of the Sharon United Church parish in Langley, she joined the building committee and chaired the building finance committee to help see the 116-year old church through a major renovation and addition to better serve the community.

Kit Farrar was a driven, compassionate and caring woman whose conviction helped make a difference to so many ... from her own family to the health science professionals who struggled with the idea of organizing a union in the early 1970s ... a union that today, 35 years later, represents 14,000 members working in health care and social services throughout British Columbia. 

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