

BULLETIN

## Cardiology technologist celebrates HSA membership

June 1, 2007

### The Report: June / July 2007 vol.28 num.3

by LAURA BUSHEIKIN



**s technology alters** the shape of health care at an ever-quickeningspace, its not hard to overlook the moment when a skilled health carejob evolves into a fully-fledged health science profession.

That moment happened long ago for cardiology technologists, says Jennifer Travers, a cardiology technologist at Powell River General Hospital. Travers has been hard at work over the past few years making sure everyone in her specialized field is recognized as a health science professional ... with both the rewards and the demands that entails.

A big step forward in that process took place on February 22, 2006 when the Labour Relations Board determined that cardiology technologists are health science professionals and appropriately belong in the Health Sciences Professionals bargaining unit. In addition to changing bargaining units, the cardiology technologists changed unions, moving from the Hospital Employees Union to HSA ... which meant that cardiology technologists could put down roots in the union that truly felt like home to them, with their community of interest.

-I was very eager and excited to be in a union representing fellow professionals," says Travers, who until September 2006 served on the board of the Cardiology Technologist Association of British Columbia (CTABC), and now is HSA chief steward at her site. -We are not just people who are good workers ... we have professional level training."

Becoming part of HSA has been instrumental in creating clarity and consistency in education requirements, a subject dear to Travers heart. Originally, education for cardiology technologists involved onthe-job training supplemented by workshops and short courses, but as the job grew in complexity so did the educational options and requirements. Currently, they have a choice between a diploma and a certificate program, with, under the HSPBA agreement, a monetary incentive to attain the diploma qualification.

Travers says her own training was ideal, combining on-the-job experience with formal study at BCIT.

A chance encounter brought her into the CT profession, she explains.

-I started out as a lab assistant," she says. -I was doing ECGs as part of that. I came down with a cold one day and the doctor sent me for a respiratory test. The manager there was doing the test, and he asked what I did.

Well, his ears pricked right up and he asked if I was interested in doing something different, since they were short of techs in the cardiology department."

Jennifer Travers Cardiology technologist Powell River General Hospital
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At that point it was Travers ears that pricked up.

-I was very interested in getting into CT. I wanted to acquire a more in-depth understanding of the technology." The CT program is pretty much the next step in learning interpretation.

-I went straight down to see the supervisor there. They offered me employment as a cardiology assistant if I were to take the CT course concurrently.

-It was great ... I could bring my questions from school to work with me. The technologist was a great support. That made a huge difference to my education.

Travers took about 18 months to earn her certificate and is now working towards her diploma.


However, that wont be the end of her education. CTs need to upgrade their training regularly to keep up with technological change. -Things are changing so much in cardiology," says Travers, who had just returned from a two-week pacemaker programming and implementation training. -Although the basic shape of the heart beat never changes in an ECG, there will be more changes in the way we do the testing."

Travers enjoys learning about the ever-changing technology of cardiology, but she says that what she most enjoys about her job is the contact with patients.

An empathetic -bedside manner" is, in some ways, as important as technical proficiency. CTs are often dealing with patients at very vulnerable moments. For instance, patients undergoing testing often know only that there may be something wrong with their hearts. The cardiology technologist may be one of the first health care providers they encounter.

-Sometimes theyre scared and nervous. Part of your job is to sit there and listen to their concerns. Theyre wondering what theyll find out with the test and they have lots of questions. To be diagnosed with a cardiac condition is a serious thing. They dont always feel they can approach the doctor on the same level as they can approach me," says Travers.

Another area where CTs play a crucial role is in the emergency room, says Travers. -When someone has chest pains, an ECG is the first test ordered." The technologist administers and interprets the ECG, which will tell them if the patients pains indicate a heart problem. -Were able to flag these patients to help with the triaging and speed things up when theres a problem with the heart."

As well as combining full-time work with study, Travers finds time for union activism. -I hadnt been involved before, but as soon as we transferred to HSA I said I wanted to be a union steward," she explains. In the spring of 2006 she took over the chief steward position at her facility. One of her main goals is educating people about the value of union activism. 

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