

BULLETIN

## Whistleblower comes to BC

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LABORATORY TECHNOLOGIST KELLY LEWIS STOOD UP FOR PATIENT CARE IN ALBERTA

by LAURA BUSHEIKIN

**HSA MEMBER KELLY LEWIS** has no hesitation about describing herself as a "squawker." In fact, she's proud to be someone who speaks out when she sees an injustice.

"If I think something's not right, I'll stand up and say it's not fair," she says.

"When I had my evaluation at work, my manager commented that I was not afraid to put new ideas forward. I said, "You really worded that nicely," she recounts with a delighted peal of laughter.

Speaking out doesn't always yield immediate results, but it's unquestionably worthwhile, she explains. "Everyone knows that the squeaky wheel gets the grease."

Lewis is a laboratory technologist at Creston Valley Hospital. She is also an HSA Assistant Steward and was recently elected a bargaining proposal conference delegate for her region.

She moved to Creston in 2002 from Calgary, Alberta, where she was an active member of the Health Sciences Association of Alberta. Her experience there with the privatization of laboratory services gave her a great opportunity to, shall we say, find her voice as a "squawker."

She had worked for years at the Calgary General as a laboratory technologist, specializing in microbiology, when a decision was made to combine all the lab services into one private lab called Calgary Laboratory Services (CLS). Lewis found herself working for a private employer ... and was not pleased with what she saw there.

"We were told speed was more important than accuracy. That's their idea of efficiency and that's what private labs are all about. And that meant they were compromising patient care.

"I spoke up, so of course I was seen as a trouble maker. I just kept saying this wasn't right, that wasn't right, and this wasn't right!" Lewis was very active in HSAA at that time, serving on the bargaining committee during the transition to the private lab and then acting as a "Rep" (the term used at that worksite for a Steward) at her new workplace. "It was a great way to stay informed about what was happening, especially when making a new collective agreement with CLS," she says.

Although the union was strong, says Lewis, the challenges of providing an acceptable standard of patient care in the new lab could not be easily overcome. After a year and a half, Lewis knew she had enough of the private sector and moved to the Public Health Lab of Southern Alberta, where she worked for four years

before moving to BC for personal reasons.

**THE MOVE BROUGHT BIG CHANGES** for Lewis working life. Creston Valley Hospital serves the local population of about 15,000 ... a huge difference from Calgary General. Specialization was no longer an option

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