

BULLETIN

## Adesh Kahlon, ultrasound technologist

October 3, 2013



### THE REPORT: OCTOBER 2013

BY LAURA BUSHEIKIN

Ultrasound technologist Adesh Kahlon knew early on what career path she wanted. And when she got into that career, she knew, with equal clarity, that she wanted to be in a unionized workplace.

So when CML Health Care, the private facility in Surrey she's worked at since 2002, was contemplating joining HSA, she supported the process in any way she could.

Her first health-care position was not unionized - but it set the course of her career. In her teens, Kahlon had a part-time job at St. Joseph's Hospital in Comox, delivering food trays to patients and long-term care residents. Even at that young age, Kahlon realized she'd found her direction.

"I really liked working with the patients," she says. "The interactions were really interesting and meaningful." So after high school graduation, she went into a three-year x-ray program with two years at BCIT and one year of clinical placement. While working at the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton, she signed up for on-the-job training as a medical sonographer (also known as ultrasound technologist), eager not just to learn a new skill but also to move into a field that has more patient interaction.

The Cross Institute was unionized and Kahlon could see how that benefited everyone. When she moved back to BC and got a position with CML, she was happy to get a job she loves at a great facility in a vibrant,

multicultural neighbourhood, but disappointed to find that the workplace was not part of a union.

This changed in 2008 when the CML staff voted in favour of joining HSA. Since then, says Kahlon, her workplace has seen many benefits.

“The most important thing is the collective agreement. If there are any issues we follow a process and protocol. It applies to everyone equally and fairly. Before this people were paid different wages for doing the same job, no one knew how much others were making...now it is all clear.

“Everyone gets paid for overtime; we have proper coffee breaks and lunch breaks; casual is handled better; seniority is considered when there are job openings; and we have job security.

“We have an RRSP plan with employer contributions, and there’s been a lot of health and safety improvements. We now have proper monthly safety checks and we have a general and a health and safety steward that members can bring their concerns to.”

All this translates into better patient care, says Kahlon. “We have better equipment which is looked after properly. We are able to properly address workload issues, and thus give more time to our patients, and perform better in general. When you’re happier, and things run better generally, of course it transfers to your clientele.”

Kahlon plunged into union involvement, joining committees, attending winter school, taking trainings, working on her local MLA’s election campaign with the support of HSA’s political action fund, and serving as constituency liaison.

“Being active in HSA has had a positive influence on all aspects of my life. I’ve probably learned more in the last few years than I did in the ten years before that. My awareness has expanded so much. Of course, workplace rights are central, but HSA’s focus also expands into human rights, women’s rights and global rights.

“Being politically active has made me realize we all have the heart to change things for the better. We just need to be courageous enough to ask the questions, and engage in the opportunities that come our way. HSA has given me great opportunities to do that.”

With a job she loves, a union that continually broadens her horizons and allows her to make a positive difference in the world, Kahlon is in a great position.

“I feel really lucky. If you enjoy what you do, your energy and enthusiasm just multiply,” she concludes.

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