

February 7, 2017

## **Government response to recommendations to address sonographer shortages**

The HSPBA/HEABC Recruitment and Retention Committee last reported that it had submitted its Report and Recommendations concerning the sonographer shortage to the Ministry of Health (MoH) and the Public Sector Employers' Council Secretariat (PSEC), in accordance with the parties' mandate under the Memorandum of Understanding that created the Committee during the last round of bargaining.

The Committee's detailed report outlined the extent of the sonographer shortage in BC's public sector and its impact on patient care, as well as factors contributing to the shortage. The report focused on recommendations to increase the number of Sonographers trained in B.C., and to improve the recruitment and retention of Sonographers in B.C.'s public sector. These recommendations include (in summary):

Short-Term (for immediate implementation):

- That MoH and PSEC approve a market adjustment for sonographers.
- That BCIT significantly increase (ideally double) the number of training spaces in its Diagnostic Medical Sonography Diploma program starting in September 2016.
- That BCIT maintain the existing two-year program for some sonographers, but also introduce a shorter, fast-track program by creating separate cardiac and general sonography streams.
- That BCIT decrease clinical placement length by offering students more time in its simulation lab.
- That health authorities, with the Ministry of Advanced Education (AVED) and BCIT assistance, take immediate steps to train existing medical imaging staff to perform ultrasound through one-year, in-house programs that use a distance education model for the didactic portion of training.
- That health authorities, at their discretion, work with HSPBA to offer recruitment incentives on a without prejudice/without precedent basis (e.g. signing bonuses, education funding linked to return-to-service agreements, etc.).
- That AVED consider offering government-funded bursaries for students enrolled in the Diagnostic Medical Sonography Diploma program.

Medium-Term (for implementation within the next one to two years):

- That BCIT continue to increase the intake of students into the Diagnostic Medical Sonography Diploma program.
- That BCIT allow the health authorities to sponsor seats in the Diagnostic Medical Sonography Diploma program for existing health authority employees.
- That health authorities use Burwin Institute programs or a program similar to Northern Health Authority's Sonography Training at Rural Sites ("STARS") to address shortages and retention issues in rural and remote communities.

Long Term (within two to five years):

- That MoH and AVED consider creating a second Diagnostic Medical Sonography Diploma program located outside of Metro Vancouver.

The Committee received a written response from MoH and PSEC, who thanked the Committee for their work. They noted that MoH and AVED have worked together to create 18 additional education seats per year for diagnostic medical sonographers, including 16 fast-track seats (one year program).

MoH and PSEC are considering other strategies in the Committee's report and are in the process of determining how best to increase the supply of trained sonographers and support their recruitment in specific geographic areas. They look forward to more opportunities to work together in identifying solutions that will result in the best possible health care for the patients of British Columbia.

MoH and PSEC have responded that at this time it is unclear that a market adjustment would resolve the current recruitment or retention challenge. They note the importance of evaluating the impact of any strategy (including market adjustments) on other professional disciplines and the health care system generally. Their position is that "a single profession market adjustment can only be considered after other recruitment and retention strategies, such as education and training, are fully utilized."

The Committee will continue to look for ways to work with government to address the critical shortage of Sonographers in B.C.'s public sector.