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# HSA negotiates elimination of punitive aspects of BC's policy on mandatory flu vaccinations

On the eve of the implementation of a new province-wide policy that threatened to fire health science professionals who refused to declare whether they had been vaccinated against seasonal flu, Health Sciences Association has negotiated an agreement that sees the government back off on the policy's punitive aspects.

This year, the Ministry of Health will focus on educational efforts and onsite influenza clinics to promote compliance. In the coming months the Ministry will work with unions and management to best determine a comprehensive approach to full scale implementation of the policy. Therefore, the enforcement components of the policy will be put on hold and non-compliant staff are not to be disciplined. HSA, like the health ministry, recognizes that protecting vulnerable patients in British Columbia is a shared responsibility.

"When the policy was introduced in the fall, HSA immediately grieved the policy, which forced virtually anybody who works in health care to be immunized and make a public declaration they have been vaccinated; or wear surgical masks every day for the duration of the declared flu season," said HSA President Reid Johnson.

"This agreement reached today takes away the threat of discipline, and reverts to the practice of educating members about the value of vaccination, and taking precautionary measures in the event of a flu outbreak – not for the duration of a flu 'season'," he said.

"HSA continues to encourage members to be vaccinated and to take advantage of on-site flu vaccine clinics, but we also recognize that individual health care workers have a right to make their personal health decisions. If they choose not to be vaccinated for any number of factors – including experiences with bad side effects to vaccines, and fundamental, philosophical, or religious objections to vaccination – that is their right. During a flu outbreak, the long-standing policy of relocating staff, wearing protective masks, or staying at home will continue," Johnson said.