



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

# NEWS RELEASE

---

▶ **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**August 21, 2008**

## Okanagan hospitals lose trades and maintenance workers to privatization

*P3 expansion plan forces 53 layoffs at Vernon Jubilee and Kelowna General hospitals*

More than 53 experienced trades and maintenance workers, members of the Hospital Employees' Union, will lose their jobs as the Interior Health Authority (IHA) pushes ahead with its public-private partnership (P3) expansion plans for Vernon Jubilee and Kelowna General hospitals.

The impacted workers include electricians, plumbers, power engineers, electronic technicians and other maintenance workers, who are responsible for ensuring that hospital systems and equipment are well maintained and quickly repaired with little disruption to patients and other staff.

"Our trades and maintenance workers avert crises every day by maintaining the hospitals' electrical, mechanical and other systems in good working order, or by rapidly responding to unexpected emergencies like power outages, plumbing problems and equipment breakdowns," says HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy.

"Because of their dedication, knowledge and expertise, regular hospital routines – like surgeries and maternity care – frequently continue with little or no interruption to patients or staff."

In September of last year, the IHA-issued Request for Proposals for the public-private partnership expansion of Vernon Jubilee (VJH) and Kelowna General (KGH) included trades and maintenance services, as well as hospital housekeeping. While housekeeping will remain in-house, the intense media scrutiny and public opposition to the contracting out of hospital services failed to save trades and maintenance from privatization.

"Trades and maintenance workers are some of the unsung heroes in our hospitals," says Darcy. "Yet, the IHA is going to toss their years of experience and dedication aside in favour of a private firm that cannot deliver the same high quality of services, experience and commitment that our members provide every day."

The P3 privatization is continuing, despite a comprehensive proposal presented by HEU trades and maintenance workers to IHA officials earlier this year in an effort to keep the services intact at the two hospitals. The presentation was part of a process that the union negotiated in the *Bill 29* settlement agreement with government last year. Under this process, health authorities must notify and consult with the union whenever they intend to contract out or to re-tender previously privatized services.

An HEU-commissioned poll taken in the Vernon-Kelowna area in June 2007 found that 80 per cent of respondents thought that the IHA should reject government's direction to privatize services if it felt that doing so would put patient care and safety at risk. And 87 per cent thought that patient safety and quality of care should be the top priorities when making decisions regarding the \$200 million P3 project.

-30-

Contact: Olive Dempsey, communications officer, 604-816-3917 (cell)

