



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Health care jobs at risk in hospital expansion plans

Bid documents released Monday open door to wholesale privatization of support services and loss of more than 300 jobs in Kelowna and Vernon

The provincial government's plan to turn over the financing and operation of expanded hospital facilities in the Okanagan to private corporations could include massive job losses, says the Hospital Employees' Union.

A Request for Qualifications (RFQ) issued today by Interior Health opens the door to a private sector takeover of housekeeping, trades and maintenance services at existing hospitals as part of the public-private partnership arrangement announced by the premier on Friday.

The result would be layoffs for more than 300 workers at Kelowna General and Vernon Jubilee hospitals.

"This would be the single largest termination of health care workers since the mass layoffs of this government's first term," says HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy. "The loss of these skilled, experienced health care workers will undermine patient care and the economic base of these communities."

Hospital cleaning in the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island has been contracted out by government. Wages for privatized jobs have fallen to \$12 an hour, making it impossible to retain the experienced staff essential to effective infection control.

"The Okanagan can avoid these same mistakes," says Darcy. "IHA and our union have worked together to find cost efficiencies and improve quality in hospital services like patient food and laundry. And we've protected decent, family-supporting jobs in the process."

Darcy says the timing of the premier's announcement of a plan that could be the backdoor for massive job losses is ironic, given that it happened the very week his caucus voted to support a 29 per cent wage increase for themselves.

"This move demonstrates a profound lack of understanding of how their privatization policies are affecting workers and it won't meet the fairness test for most Okanagan residents," says Darcy.

Health care workers will attend the next Interior Health board of directors meeting to make the case for maintaining in-house services. The meeting is scheduled for May 23 in Vernon.

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Contact: Mike Old, communications director, 604-828-6771 (cell)
Katherine Kreller, Okanagan director, 250-765-8838 (o) or 250-859-2205 (cell)

