



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWSLETTER

PLEASE POST

VIHA board taken to task over unexpected announcement of 350 long-term bed cuts

More than 200 rally in Qualicum to keep Cowichan Lodge open, maintain beds and stop privatization of seniors' care

Seniors, community advocates and health care workers came from across Vancouver Island to Qualicum Beach on July 30 to attend the Vancouver Island Health Authority board meeting and to rally in support of maintaining long-term care beds, saving Cowichan Lodge from closure and stopping any further encroachment of private, for-profit operators in seniors' care.

Before the board meeting began, a crowd of more than 200 listened intently to speeches by HEU president Fred Muzin, Cowichan Lodge chairperson Norah Murphy, Lodge family member Don Gordon, NDP leader Carole James and others, booing when told of VIHA's disrespectful behaviour toward residents and their families and health care workers, and cheering when the health authority was encouraged to make amends by keeping Cowichan Lodge open.

Inside the board meeting, as Cowichan Lodge family member Joanna Neilson was introduced to the board, HEU members carried in copies of the "Save Cowichan Lodge" petition signed by more than 10,500 citizens.

Neilson told VIHA board members of the shock and dismay felt by residents, their families, the health care workers who care for them, and the community at-large, at the surprise closure announcement on June 20.

Neilson criticized the process and questioned many aspects of the unexpected bed closures and relocation of affected seniors. She spoke of the negative impacts that such moves have on the frail elderly and the anxiety felt by families over the options provided by VIHA for their loved ones.

BC Health Coalition co-chairperson Joyce Jones then presented to the board, relating recent studies that have found care levels to be lower in for-profit operations as compared to not-for-profit long-term care facilities. Jones also pointed out that not only does B.C. currently have the lowest number of care hours per resident in the country, it has the fewest number of long-term care beds per 1000 population as well.

VIHA CEO Howard Waldner disputed the findings regarding care levels, saying that there was "no difference in care". He also contested the other documented figures.

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Before VIHA chairperson Jac Kreut prematurely adjourned the meeting after members of the audience spontaneously challenged the board's actions and behaviour, Waldner did say that despite speculation, Cowichan Lodge will not be sold. He said that VIHA will retain ownership of the property and is working with the Ministry of Health to determine how to best utilize the facility.

After the abrupt adjournment, Waldner took questions from the media away from the eyes and ears of the public. At this time, he indicated that Cowichan Lodge would be closed as decided by the board.

Community efforts to save Cowichan Lodge continue with a lawn sign campaign in the Duncan area and an appeal of the decision to reduce the notice of closure period from 12 months to two months.

To demonstrate your concern over the bed cuts, closure of Cowichan Lodge and ongoing privatization of seniors' care, contact:

VIHA CEO Howard Waldner, janet.shute@viha.ca
Minister George Abbott, george.abbott.mla@leg.gov.ca
Premier Gordon Campbell, premier.mla@leg.gov.ca

Or phone Waldner, Abbott and Campbell by calling Enquiry BC at 250-387-6121 in Victoria, 604-660-2421 in the Lower Mainland, or 1 800-663-7867 elsewhere in the province. Enquiry BC will re-route your call.

July 31, 2008