



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

# NEWSLETTER

PLEASE POST

## VIHA delays closure of Cowichan Lodge

*Seniors' care home to remain open until August 2009*

In the face of overwhelming community opposition to the pending closure of Cowichan Lodge, the Vancouver Island Health Authority has announced it will abide by the legally required 12-month notice period and keep the Lodge open until August 2009.

The health authority had skirted its own rules by writing itself an exemption earlier this summer in order to facilitate the Lodge's closure by September 15.

"By extending the notice period, VIHA has shown that it's definitely feeling the pressure, but it's still not listening," says HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy. "Seniors, their families, care staff and the public are demanding VIHA reverse its plan to shut down the Lodge. A longer notice period leading to full closure a year from now doesn't even begin to respond to the outpouring of anger and disillusionment that's come from every quarter of the Cowichan community."

VIHA's June 20 announcement that it planned to eliminate 350 publicly-owned, long-term care beds to make room for more privately-owned facilities sparked massive protests in Island communities. In Duncan, rallies, town hall meetings, and a petition with more than 10,000 signatures have demanded the health authority keep Cowichan Lodge open.

And more recently, a legal challenge to the September 15 closure date was scheduled to be heard before the Community Care and Assisted Living Appeal Board on August 26 in Duncan.

Darcy says it's not too late for VIHA to stop this tragedy from unfolding any further, and put care for vulnerable seniors at the top of its priority list.

"VIHA needs to take a long, hard look at the critical role our public care homes – and their skilled, experienced staff – have in providing Island seniors with safe, quality care," she says.

And Darcy criticized VIHA for closing the Lodge to any further admissions during the extended notice period.

"B.C. has the lowest number of beds for seniors in the country," she says. "There's absolutely no justification for denying Island seniors access to this badly-needed resource."

In light of the new closure date for Cowichan Lodge, the union is seeking a meeting with VIHA officials to discuss how this latest development will impact staffing and union members' rights.

In July, HEU negotiated a Memorandum of Agreement with VIHA to provide more options for members impacted by the closures.

HEU members affected include care aides, LPNs, activity aides, rehab assistants, unit clerks, housekeeping, laundry, and food service workers.

*August 21, 2008*

