



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

# NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 21, 2009

## Strike notice served at Qualicum Beach care home

The Hospital Employees' Union today issued 72-hour strike notice to Pro Vita, the subcontractor providing care services at Qualicum Gardens on Vancouver Island.

As a result, about 60 care aides working at the Gardens (located on Berwick Road North in Qualicum Beach) will be in a position to take job action Friday, April 24 at 12:00 noon.

"The care aides at Qualicum Gardens have the lowest wages of all long-term care facilities on Southern Vancouver Island," says HEU bargaining representative David Durning.

"Serious staff shortages and huge workloads have made it difficult to provide quality care for the residents.

"But Pro Vita is unwilling to address the staff recruitment and retention problems, substandard wages, or the impact of workload on the quality and continuity of resident care."

The operator of Qualicum Gardens – Chartwell Seniors Housing REIT – has been approached by Pro Vita about recruitment and retention challenges at the facility, but has refused to fund improvements to wages.

Pro Vita has since terminated its commercial contract with Qualicum Gardens, and recently issued pink slips to employees, effective at midnight on June 23.

The union began negotiations in September 2008 to renew its collective agreement and rejected the employer's final offer by an overwhelming 85 per cent last week.

The union has met with Chartwell to discuss bringing care services back in-house after Pro Vita leaves the facility.

Under B.C. labour laws, HEU has an essential services plan and staffing levels in place to ensure resident care, comfort and safety are not at risk during strike action.

Care aides were first contracted out to Pro Vita in 2005 under the provisions of the BC Liberals' *Bill 29* which rewrote health care collective agreements. That law was later struck down by the Supreme Court of Canada.

Chartwell receives \$5.5 million a year from the Vancouver Island Health Authority to operate 85 long-term care beds at the facility.

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