



Seniors' care rally draws enthusiastic crowd in Duncan last weekend

More than 200 seniors' care supporters turned out for a weekend rally – organized by HEU and BCGEU in conjunction with local seniors advocates – at Duncan City Square to protest the ongoing cuts, privatization and contracting out at Lodge on 4th and Cerwydden Care in the Cowichan Valley.

Kim Slater, a seniors' advocate whose mother is currently at Nanaimo Seniors Village, told the crowd that continuity is imperative to providing quality care to seniors. "What interrupts that continuity is simple – contract-flipping, mass layoffs and facility closures," he said, adding that pink-slipped workers "are not alone."

Slater urged attendees to support recent recommendations from the B.C. Ombudsperson, including legislation to support family councils, and improved transparency of information related to long-term care facilities.

"This government treats health care workers and families as irritants," said Slater. "Everybody gets this. The only people who don't get it are the provincial government and regional health authorities."

Other speakers included HEU member Sheila Niehaus, who's been contracted out three times including Lodge on 4th. Her message was that contracting out wasn't working for seniors or workers.

Scott Delong, a BCGEU local vice-chair, spoke on behalf of workers contracted out at Cerwydden Care. Delong said his members were not just concerned about their own jobs, but about the seniors they looked after day in and day out.

Family member Joan Cochrane described in detail the daily work she observed from the caregivers who support her husband John at Lodge on 4th, and emphasized the importance of ending contracting out in order to provide seniors with consistent care.

And Joanna Nielsen, a vocal supporter of Cowichan Lodge, reminded people about the B.C. government's Conversation on Health, where "seniors were very clear about what they needed and wanted."

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Seniors want to be treated with respect, to die with dignity, to be listened to, to live in homes that are safe and comfortable, and have people who are familiar to care for them.

“They want skilled, compassionate assistance and support,” said Nielsen, who also noted that for-profit facilities cost more and provide substandard care.

Beverly McKeen, a local performer who composed the “Save Cowichan Lodge” song, emceed the event, urging people to get involved and speak out for seniors.

Rally participants signed a petition to government and were encouraged to attend the upcoming VIHA board meeting in Victoria to join with other Island residents in protesting cuts and privatization in seniors’ care.

April 26, 2010