



# News Release

THE HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Another U.S. bid – this time for B.C. hospital records – renews fears of *Patriot Act***

*HEU asks for review of Vancouver Coastal plan to send records south*

The Hospital Employees' Union is calling on the B.C. Privacy Commissioner to include a Vancouver Coastal Health Authority plan to turn over hospital medical transcripts to a U.S. company in a review of public services being outsourced to U.S.-linked service providers.

The union's request comes after last week's announcement by Privacy Commissioner David Loukidelis that he plans to examine the implications of the *USA Patriot Act* in privatization initiatives that give American companies access to sensitive private information about British Columbians. Specifically, HEU says the VCHA's plan to hire a U.S. firm to handle computerized patient records raises fears that Canadians' personal lives could be probed by the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The VCHA has shortlisted two U.S. companies to provide a web-based interface for medical transcription services that would put confidential patient records on a U.S.-based server. The two finalists are Dictaphone, a Connecticut-based firm that provides extensive IT services for the US Army and MedRemote, an Illinois-based medical documentation firm.

"Some months ago, the BC Government and Services Employees' Union raised concerns that the government's decision to outsource computerized patient lists for the Medical Services Plan and Pharmacare to U.S.-based Maximus might leave British Columbians vulnerable to provisions of the *USA Patriot Act*," HEU secretary-business manager Chris Allnutt says in a letter to Loukidelis.

"We share the BCGEU's concern with regard to the VCHA's outsourcing of transcription services."

The MSP and Pharmacare contract would give the U.S. global giant Maximus, the winning bidder, access to private records on every British Columbian. This includes health treatment, pharmacy, income tax, mental health and criminal records, as well as records from the ministries of Children and Family Development and Human Resources.

Critics say the switch toward privatized, US-controlled IT services runs a high risk of conflict with the *Patriot Act*, an anti-terrorism bill signed after September 11, 2001. The Act has been widely criticized for, among other things, allowing the FBI to demand that corporations secretly hand over medical records and other personal information deemed relevant to an investigation. The American Civil Liberties Union says that the FBI, citing the *Patriot Act*, can gain access to the private medical records of Canadians held by US firms.

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