

News Release



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GAG ORDER ON VANCOUVER ISLAND HEALTH CARE WORKERS UNDERMINES "HEALTH CONVERSATION"

*Health authorities need clear direction from health minister
that health care workers can participate*

Health Minister George Abbott must clarify with B.C.'s health authorities that health care workers are both "welcome and encouraged" to participate in the ongoing "Conversation on Health" launched by the government two weeks ago.

The Hospital Employees' Union and the B.C. Nurses' Union are making the demand in response to a Vancouver Island Health Authority directive barring employees from speaking to MLAs or MPs without the authority's permission.

During his September 28 launch of the "Conversation on Health," Premier Gordon Campbell said that community health forums organized by MLAs would be a key component of the consultation.

"This health authority's attitude – that health care workers should be seen but not heard – seriously undermines the credibility of the government's conversation on health," says HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy.

"It's very important that health authorities receive a clear message from government that participation from front-line health care workers is not just welcome and encouraged – but critical to finding solutions," adds Darcy.

BCNU South Islands Co-chairperson Jacquie Ferrier says the VIHA gag order raises serious questions about the openness of the consultation process.

"It's not much of a conversation if nurses and other health care workers are being actively discouraged from speaking out," says Ferrier.

"And it's hard to imagine a conversation worth having if those who deliver health care are not at the table."

The unions are asking the health minister to direct B.C.'s six health authorities to clarify with employees that they are free to participate in the various activities being organized around the government's health consultation process.

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Contact: Mike Old, communications director, 604-828-6771 (cell)
Shirley Ross, BCNU communications officer, 604-209-4258 (cell)

