



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Union raises concerns over backlogged medical reports

An alarming backlog in transcribing and processing medical reports in the Lower Mainland is putting patient care at risk, says the Hospital Employees' Union.

The union has learned that more than 16,500 patient reports were waiting in a queue to be transcribed last week for UBC, Vancouver General and Richmond hospitals, while others are more than two weeks behind in processing reports.

This backlog is especially disturbing since some hospitals delete patient reports that have been in the voice-dictation queue too long. For instance, Fraser Health Authority has a policy of doing a monthly purge of medical reports "on-hold" for more than 60 days, resulting in patients having incomplete medical charts. Other hospitals have unprocessed reports that remain "in limbo" for years, therefore never making it into the patients' medical files.

HEU secretary-business manager Bonnie Pearson blames the crisis on health authorities' mismanagement of medical transcription services and says things will only get worse if their plan to contract out 130 in-house medical transcriptionists (MTs) proceeds later this year.

"In recent years, Lower Mainland health authorities have been shifting more and more medical transcription services to private, for-profit companies," says Pearson. "They've been downsizing staff, not filling vacancies, increasing service volume, and leaving the remaining in-house MTs working to full capacity with exhausting hours of overtime."

In fact, in-house medical transcriptionists are also assigned to spend hours each day editing and correcting outsourced reports, taking away valuable time from transcribing reports waiting in the backlogged database.

To deal with the crisis, health authorities have authorized exorbitant amounts of overtime to HEU MTs. They've recruited temporary workers from an agency, and continue using at least two private MT service providers to help clear up the growing backlog.

"Patients expect that their medical records will be accurate and processed in a timely manner," says Pearson. "They should not be in surgery while their pre-anaesthetic consultations are sitting in a database waiting to be transcribed. Clearly, this privatization plan is failing B.C. patients."

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