



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Ombudsperson provides roadmap for improved standards in residential care facilities

Establishment of seniors' advocate a positive move, but government response to ombudsperson's report fails to address need for enforceable standards of care and minimum staffing levels, says HEU

B.C.'s largest health care union says the establishment of a seniors' advocate, announced today by the provincial health minister, is long overdue and will improve quality of care for seniors.

But the Hospital Employees' Union says it is unfortunate that the B.C. Liberal government won't take clear and immediate steps to implement the B.C. Ombudsperson's recommendations to establish quality care standards in residential care facilities.

The ombudsperson has recommended minimum staffing levels and direct care hours in residential care, as well as specific and objectively measurable standards for bathing, toileting, dental care and other aspects of personal care.

But instead of moving to implement these recommendations, the province has made a vague commitment to standardize benefits and protections by next year, and to embark on a two-year review of best practices in other jurisdictions.

HEU secretary-business manager Bonnie Pearson says B.C. Ombudsperson Kim Carter has provided a detailed roadmap for improvements to seniors' care.

"But at this point, it does not appear that government is prepared to commit themselves to many of the specific measures outlined in her report," says Pearson. "In our view, that's a lost opportunity to correct some fundamental problems that we face in seniors' care."

Health care workers in residential care identify staffing shortages and the resulting heavy workloads as the key reason for being unable to deliver adequate levels of care to residents.

In her report, Carter also noted that the province has not taken steps to protect those in residential care from the impacts of large-scale staff replacement and recommended that the health ministry and health authorities address this issue.

Over the last ten years, large-scale staff turnover has been endemic in the residential care sector as a result of privatization and contracting out. Continuity of care for residents has suffered as a result. But government's action plan on seniors unveiled today fails to address this issue.

20,000 HEU members work in seniors' care across the province. They are licensed practical nurses, resident care attendants, activity workers, rehabilitation assistants and support workers.

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Contact: Margi Blamey, communications officer, 604-456 7094 (direct), 604-785 5324 (cell)

