



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

NEWS RELEASE

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Plan to contract out medical transcription threatens patient confidentiality – HEU

The Hospital Employees' Union says a plan by Lower Mainland health authorities to contract out all medical transcription services threatens to put the confidentiality and accuracy of patient records at risk.

On Thursday, health authorities issued a request for proposals to contract out the work of more than 130 medical transcriptionists who work out of three hubs located in Vancouver, New Westminster and Abbotsford.

HEU secretary-business manager Bonnie Pearson says the move will transfer control over the accuracy and confidentiality of sensitive patient records to a private contractor.

“Health authorities have a responsibility to both patients and physicians to maintain close control over highly sensitive patient records,” says Pearson. “This ill-thought out move by health employers comes with an unacceptably high degree of risk.”

Medical transcriptionists are responsible for transcribing physicians' voice-recorded dictation of surgical procedures, consultations, patient histories, laboratory and diagnostic test results, and various reports.

A shortage of skilled medical transcriptionists and failure of health authorities to fill vacancies with qualified staff have forced employers to outsource some transcription services to a private contractor.

In addition to working a huge amount of overtime to try to address the backlog of reports and fast-track priority reports, in-house medical transcriptionists have already raised red flags about the quality of the outsourced reports they receive to edit and correct.

“Protecting the integrity of confidential patient records should be health employers' first priority,” says Pearson, who adds that in-house medical transcriptionists have access to physicians for clarification on files. That helps reduce wait times for tests and procedures.

“Health employers should be focused on finding solutions that don't involve privatizing patient records and putting this information at risk,” says Pearson. “Government should put the brakes on this ill-considered move.”

HEU says that as far as it is aware, no Canadian jurisdiction has contracted out medical transcription on this scale.

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