



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

# NEWSLETTER

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## Fee increases in residential care are hurting seniors – survey

*“Standards of Respect” reveals heavy financial and human cost to residents and their families while care and services decline*

The B.C. government's fee increases for people living in long-term care facilities, which came into effect on January 1, 2010, have hurt residents and family members – and that will only get worse when fees rise again on New Year's Day, 2011.

That's the bottom line of a survey, *“Standards of Respect: the Human Cost of Residential Care Fee Increases in British Columbia”*, commissioned by the Hospital Employees' Union. It found that the new rates left people facing untenable financial and personal burdens.

All residents are expected to pay 80 per cent of their after tax income in residential fees and have a minimum of \$275 a month left over for personal expenses such as: medical equipment (wheelchairs and hearing aids); appointments with dentists, optometrists, physiotherapists and other specialists; telephone, cable, and internet fees; and hygiene products, clothing, and other personal necessities.

“Standards of Respect” reveals the human cost resulting from those fee increases. Residents and family members report making difficult personal choices and sacrifices, which are accompanied by heightened anxiety, chronic sleeplessness and depression.

One young mother living in a care facility reports foregoing treatment for her own dental emergency so that her daughter could see a dentist. And some seniors, together for decades but with one partner now in care, have made the heart-breaking decision to legally separate in order to ensure that both will have their financial needs met.

Contrary to government claims that the fee increases will go to directly to improving care, residents report a steady decline in the quality of care and service provided in facilities. Increasingly, people are paying out-of-pocket for everything from their own food or incontinence products to private nurses.

Finally, the report found that few knew that there is a hardship review process. The lack of knowledge about the review process extended to health authorities and to the Ministry of Health Services. When information about the hardship review was unearthed, the process proved to be onerous, complicated and largely unsuccessful.

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HEU recently presented the report's findings to B.C. Ombudsperson Kim Carter who has been examining the state of seniors' care in the province.

In August 2008, she launched a far-reaching and comprehensive systemic investigation into seniors' care issues in B.C.

Carter issued *The Best of Care: Getting it Right for Seniors in British Columbia (Part 1)*, December 2009. It contained 10 recommendations to government including a call for the formation of resident and family councils supported by legislation, a comprehensive website about B.C.'s residential care facilities, and a genuine residents' bill of rights.

Most of the recommendations have yet to be acted upon.

Carter's highly anticipated final report is expected to be released in the spring of 2011.

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