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Throne Speech: Nurses welcome commitment to streamlined degree, question continued push for schemes like tax shelters to fund seniors care

Nurses are pleased the provincial government has accepted some of the solutions it received during its Conversation on Health to address the shortage of health care providers. But they're disappointed that with today's Throne Speech the government continues to promote various market-driven financing schemes for health care that received virtually no public support during the year-long consultation process.

"We especially welcome the Throne Speech commitment to create a three-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing program that will enable nurses to join the workforce a year earlier," says Debra McPherson, "Anything that provides more help for our overworked nurses and other health care providers caring for patients is appreciated.

"We're also pleased to see the government has recognized the importance of providing more support for seniors who wish to stay in their homes and for mental health services."

"Unfortunately, the government is not talking about providing much-needed acute and long term care beds to relieve pressures that are resulting in hallway nursing and overcrowding from a growing and aging population.

McPherson welcomes the move to authorize and train nurses to deliver a broader range of health services such as suturing, ultrasounds and allergy testing. "But adding more tasks onto people who are already struggling will add some new challenges."

McPherson is particularly concerned the government is studying a scheme to create an "Independent Living Savings Account" for seniors to save for their own home care and supportive housing.

"This kind of scheme is anathema to the principles of medicare and the Canada Health Act which holds that needed health care services should be available to all regardless of income. Medically-necessary home support and home care must be included as part of the basket of medicare services, not something you can pay for or not, depending on the money you can save."

This seems to contradict the government's commitment to universal medicare, while illustrating how it intends to "define" the five principles of the Canada Health Act and add "sustainability" within BC's Medicare Protection Act.

The Throne Speech commitment of "teams of health professionals working together for patients ... 24 hours a day" could provide the basis for real improvements in primary health care by utilizing the skills of nurses.

"I hope the intention is to create real public community health centres throughout BC as so many people recommended during the Conversation on Health, not physician-driven privately owned facilities that currently consume the bulk of primary health care funding," McPherson says.

"I welcome the opportunity to meet with government representatives and discuss how we will work together to implement these initiatives and deal with new nursing supply challenges."

British Columbia Nurses' Union

4060 REGENT STREET, BURNABY, B.C. V5C 6P5
TELEPHONE (604) 433-2268 toll free 1-800-663-9991 FAX (604) 433-7945 toll free 1-888-284-2222