

NEWS RELEASE



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Nurses condemn closure of psych unit at West Coast General Hospital

The VIHA decision - made with virtually no notice - will exacerbate psychiatric bed shortages throughout the Island and violates agreement to consult staff

Vancouver Island nurses are outraged with the Vancouver Island Health Authority decision to close the psychiatric unit at Port Alberni's West Coast General Hospital with only two days notice.

Jo Taylor, regional representative for the BC Nurses' Union, says the decision will exacerbate bed shortages for psychiatric patients throughout the Island and will cause huge dislocation for the seven nurses who will lose their jobs.

"From so many points of view this decision is completely baffling," Taylor says. "Emergency room nurses up and down the Island struggle on a regular basis to find beds for psychiatric patients. This decision will cause backups throughout the system. And for the Registered Nurses and Registered Psychiatric Nurses who are directly affected, the move is causing huge personal disruption and dislocation. Our members are extremely upset."

Taylor says the move appears to completely violate the spirit of cooperation and consultation that was supposed to develop as a result of the settlement of the dispute over Bill 29, following the Supreme Court of Canada ruling that some sections of the law were unconstitutional.

Part of the Bill 29 settlement involved enhanced consultation with nurses at several levels whenever health employers contemplated major changes that would affect employees. In this case, hospital managers claim notice isn't necessary because the psychiatric beds will be converted to medical beds and existing staff could be trained to operate them.

"We are very frustrated that the health authority would consider the decision to close a hospital psychiatric unit with seven beds, affecting seven nurses and untold numbers of patients needing specialized care, not to be a subject worthy of prior discussion with the BC Nurses' Union," says BCNU president Debra McPherson. "We will be following up on this matter with management immediately."

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