

# NEWS RELEASE



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## Families' lawyer calls for halt to transfers from Cowichan Lodge

### *Reports of deaths and residents' failing health because of VIHA's rush to close Lodge must be investigated*

Lawyers representing 18 residents and families at Cowichan Lodge are calling on the Health Ministry's Director of Community Care Licensing to order an immediate halt to all transfers from the Lodge and to investigate the health and safety impact of potential transfers on each resident.

Joanna Gislason of *Caroline Law* in Vancouver says at least four former residents of Cowichan Lodge have died since the closure of the Lodge was announced by VIHA CEO Harold Waldner. The health and safety of other senior citizens who transferred to Sunridge Place has also been jeopardized. *Caroline Law* is the legal team commissioned by the BC Nurses' Union to act on behalf of Cowichan Lodge residents and appeal VIHA's quick notice of closure.

"The residents of Cowichan Lodge and their families need protection until their health and safety is assured," said Gislason. "They should certainly not be in the position of having to prove harm and risk as it is occurring in VIHA's rush to try and close the facility."

In a letter to the Director of Community Care Licensing, Gislason asks for the following actions until the investigation into the wellbeing of Lodge residents is concluded:

1. Order an immediate halt to the transfer of residents from Cowichan Lodge;
2. Investigate the health and safety impacts on the transfer of each resident, and ensure that Sunridge Place is providing an adequate level of care in light of the impact of transfer trauma on frail senior citizens;
3. Order that beds at Sunridge Place be held for Cowichan Lodge residents until the investigation is concluded.

The Director of Community Care Licensing has authority under the Community Care and Assisted Living Act to stop all transfers of senior citizens from Cowichan Lodge until it is assured there is no harm to their health and that adequate care at Sunridge Place is confirmed. VIHA's attempt to close Cowichan Lodge with only two months notice is the subject of an appeal that is due to be heard by the Community Care and Assisted Living Appeal Board during the week of August 25, 2008.

On July 25, 2008 the Appeal Board suspended Chief Medical Officer Dr. Richard Stanwick's decision that allowed VIHA to close the Lodge on short notice. Cowichan Lodge will now remain open until the families' appeal is concluded. However, reports continue to emerge that residents and their families are feeling pressured to quickly move out of the Lodge for fear of losing a long term care bed in the Duncan community. This situation adversely impacts the health and safety of Cowichan Lodge residents.

"In trying to quickly close Cowichan Lodge VIHA CEO Harold Waldner has ignored the needs of patients, their families and the community he is employed to serve. As long as he acts this way the BC Nurses will support Cowichan families so that frail, vulnerable seniors get the healthcare they deserve," said Debra McPherson, President of the BC Nurses' Union.

**British Columbia Nurses' Union**

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