

## NEWS RELEASE



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### **Cowichan Lodge: nurses are incensed the government's licensing director wants VIHA to investigate itself**

*Amid reports of residents' failing health and deaths, the BC Nurses' Union says the order must be reversed because the health authority is biased to support its own decisions*

Nurses are incensed that the Health Ministry's community care licencing director wants the Vancouver Island Health Authority to investigate itself about reports of failing health and deaths among residents facing rushed transfers out of Cowichan Lodge in Duncan.

In a letter today to licencing director Sue Bedford, lawyer Joanna Gislason, representing BCNU and Cowichan Lodge residents and families, asks Bedford to reverse her position by the end of the day tomorrow. "The director of licencing should not be handing over her responsibility to protect seniors' health and safety to VIHA, which would be biased to confirm its own decisions," says BCNU president Debra McPherson. "VIHA is the agency that put residents' health and safety at risk, which is why we wrote to the director of licencing in the first place asking her for an independent investigation."

Gislason first wrote Bedford on Friday requesting she exercise her authority to order a halt to all transfers from Cowichan Lodge and to investigate the health and safety impact of potential transfer on each resident. Nurses are concerned with reports about several deaths and serious breaches of residents' health and safety since the Lodge closure was announced in June. Reports now indicate there have been seven deaths in seven weeks.

Instead of launching an independent investigation, a government lawyer reported today that Bedford had referred the issue back to VIHA's Medical Health Officer Richard Stanwick. But Stanwick is the same official who granted VIHA an exemption from the required one-year notice period for the closure of a community care facility. Backed by BCNU, the families are appealing Stanwick's decision. The appeal is to be heard on August 26 by the Community Care and Assisted Living Appeal Board, which has ordered a stay of the exemption until then.

McPherson points out that VIHA CEO Howard Waldner claims his decision to close Cowichan Lodge on only 60 days notice was "based on best evidence" and that he was following "best practices" in relocating of residents.

"It certainly appears that this is not the case," McPherson says.

**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