

NEWS RELEASE



July 21, 2010

Nurses concerned with BC's growing user fees plan

Charging patients for "convalescent care" in hospital is unacceptable and undermines medicare

Nurses are extremely concerned that the provincial government is slowly and quietly rolling out new user fees for patients needing hospital care to recover from serious illnesses or injuries across British Columbia.

Vancouver nurses just received the word that patients going to UBC's Transitional Care Unit will now have to pay about \$30.00 a day. The BC government decided earlier this year that these new "per diem" fees must be charged in every health authority. Fraser, Interior and Northern Health Authorities started the ball rolling by imposing the new charges in the spring. The fees for so-called "convalescent care" – such as those now also being charged at Langley Memorial Hospital – are for services that have always been provided in hospital and are covered by the Canada Health Act. According to criteria published by the Fraser Health Authority, the user fees are being charged for patients that "still require therapy and medical services to restore function to enable the transition from acute care to home."

"These are health services that are needed by people still in the hospital, and they have always been fully covered by MSP, our public health insurance plan in British Columbia which is funded by our tax dollars," says Melanie Leckovic, vice-president of the BC Nurses' Union. "Therefore any attempt to charge our patients fees for these medically-necessary services is completely unacceptable."

The Minister of Health told the government's health authorities earlier this year to start charging for convalescent care as "short term residential care". Leckovic says the definition is nonsense. "Convalescence has always been an integral part of hospital care and hospital care is fully covered under medicare. User fees for hospital services ended in this country when the Canada Health Act was adopted in 1984. This government must not be allowed to roll back the clock in an attempt to charge for more and more services except those that are life-threatening in nature."

"It's also disturbing that the federal government, which has the responsibility to protect patients from violations of the Canada Health Act, has said nothing about this travesty."

BC's Nurses fear these fees for "convalescent care" are just the first step in a massive cash grab, as Victoria orders health authorities to replace acute care beds for the seriously ill with these so-called "transitional care" beds with fewer professional staff.

"Frankly I'm puzzled how the government hopes to save money with the possible problems with this approach. It's not about saving money; it's about the government trying to raise revenue by charging patients for less care. It's about setting up new areas where people can be pushed quickly through the free public system into a user pay system. And it's also about a return to the old days of inequality and indignity where 'poor' folks had to receive 'charity' care. Medicare was designed to provide for us all and this government needs to stop undermining that cherished Canadian model," concluded Leckovic.

British Columbia Nurses' Union

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