

BULLETIN

Chilliwack rehab: Consult before closing

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Another union is calling for consultation before the Fraser Health Authority follows through on its plan to shut down an inpatient rehabilitation unit at Chilliwack General Hospital.

The Health Sciences Association (HSA), which represents physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers and other rehab specialists at the Chilliwack hospital, said the plan to replace a 20bed sub-acute unit with outpatient care should not go ahead without input from healthcare providers.

"Doctors and rehab specialists were not consulted on this closure," HSA president Reid Johnson said. "Our physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers, and other rehab specialists work closely with the patients at the Chilliwack rehab unit to build mobility, independence, and hope. We hope Fraser Health will consult with us before making unilateral changes that will affect the way patients are treated."

When the announcement about the closure was made last month, Jim Calvin, the Chilliwack chairperson of the Hospital Employees Union, said the closure of the inpatient unit is a huge loss for the city and local residents and workers should have been consulted.

The unit, which Fraser Health officials said will be converted over the next few months, provides intensive physical, cognitive and speech rehabilitation. Many of its patients are stroke victims, requiring three hours of treatment several times a week.

Once the unit is shut down (a move that will decrease costs, according to Fraser Health officials) patients will be able to receive outpatient care in Chilliwack. But those requiring outpatient care will have to travel to Abbotsford.

Moving inpatients a half hour away isn't a good idea, according to Johnson.

"This may not seem like a big deal, but when you're in rehab therapy, that can seem like an insurmountable difficulty," he said.

Effective rehab therapy saves the healthcare system money by allowing patients to lead productive lives and preventing them from "backsliding" and ending up back in hospitals, according to Johnson.

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