

BULLETIN

Health-sciences union workers at Cowichan hospital slow work to weekend levels

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Byline: Peter Rusland

Cowichanians whose long-awaited CT-scan dates are bumped by this week's hospital labour strife will be re-booked quickly, health brass promised Thursday.

"Those dates will be rescheduled as soon as possible; they won't go back to the bottom of the list," said Suzanne Germain of the Vancouver Island Health Authority.

"If someone has not been called (by re-booking staff), come to where you were supposed to get the procedure," she said of medical imaging that also includes X-rays, ultra-sounds, and MRIs.

She and other medical officials indicated Cowichan District Hospital's surgical and other services basically got off lightly, compared to some larger hospitals where operations were scrubbed as B.C.'s Health Sciences Association member unions staged job action today and plan more tomorrow.

Thursday saw hospital pharmacists do legislated essential services - but no picketing - between 9 a.m. and midnight. Friday involves a 24-hour slowing to weekend-service levels by medical-imaging workers.

"Local sites are a bit more flexible," said CDH's site manager Peter Fahey.

"This is job action; it's not business as usual," added Germain regarding CDH's nine pharmacy staff, plus 36 medical-diagnostic workers.

HSA president Reid Johnson agreed, as veteran mediator Vince Ready was hired Tuesday to grease talks between the HSA and the province's Health Employers' Association.

Johnson believed the HSA's wage demand of a four-percent hike, across two years, was fair after his members' contract expired on March 31.

"It's two and two, and no concessions on benefits," he told cowichannewsleader.com. "It's like what other public sectors have gotten already."

Johnson hoped Ready's raft of mediation smarts leads to a deal soon.

No job action was planned for Monday, noted Johnson, sympathizing with patients frustrated by a bump in imaging work after booking months ago.

"Those wait lists were there already because of medical-imaging staff shortages," he said.

"If we don't get a good collective agreement now, it'll just get worse."

Making things better, he said, involves VIHA starting to boost training of health sciences professionals, as was done for B.C.'s doctors and nurses.

"You have to train people over five or six years. International recruitment hasn't worked. We need B.C. students trained at competitive wages."

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