

BULLETIN

B.C. nurses brought together under new legislation

April 15, 2013

Health Minister Margaret MacDiarmid on Monday announced that new nursing legislation had been signed into law, bringing licensed practical nurses under the same bargaining structure as the B.C. Nurses' Union.

The legislation - Bill 18, the Health Authorities Amendment Act - passed last month over the objections of the Hospital Employees' Union, which called the legislation a last-minute change prepared without adequate consultation.

The heads of provincial health authorities also expressed concerns about the bill and earlier this month asked for it to be delayed.

The BCNU rallied its members to lobby the government to enact the bill, saying it would improve patient care.

"It puts all nurses under the same umbrella and will enable us all - registered nurses, registered psychiatric nurses and licensed practical nurses - to collaborate on ways to provide quality patient care," BCNU president Debra McPherson said Monday in a statement. "We also appreciate the government's action in signing the necessary order-in-council as one of its last items of business before the beginning of the provincial election campaign."

The legislation was enacted on the day before the official campaign got under way.

The parties have until April, 2014, to bring licensed practical nurses under the same collective agreement as registered nurses. Until then, existing terms and conditions for LPNs will stay in effect, resulting in no immediate cost increases, Dr. MacDiarmid said in a statement.

Health authorities remain worried about cost implications. "While concerned that implementation of Bill 18 could bring further costs to our health care system, Vancouver Coastal Health will work with government and the unions as required during the consultation process," VCH spokeswoman Anna Marie D'Angelo said Monday in an e-mail. "The 12-month evaluation period will at least give health authorities an opportunity to work through any issues and find ways to implement them in a manner that works best for everyone concerned."

After being targeted in a raid by the BCNU last year, about 7,000 members LPNs voted to join the BCNU.

Health Sciences Association president Reid Johnson called Monday's announcement a "cynical political move," saying the HSA had not been adequately consulted about the legislation, which he says dramatically changes health-care bargaining. "The legislation makes it absolutely clear that the B.C. Liberals do not understand either the legislation they rammed through, or the delicate nature of negotiations," he said.

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