REPORT RELEASED
ON SHORT NOTICE: AN INVESTIGATION OF VANCOUVER ISLAND HEALTH AUTHORITY’S PROCESS FOR CLOSING COWICHAN LODGE

VICTORIA – Today Ombudsperson Kim Carter released a report on the closing of Cowichan Lodge On Short Notice: An Investigation of Vancouver Island Health Authority's Process for Closing Cowichan Lodge. The report is the result of complaints received about the facility closure. The investigation makes six findings and six recommendations. Especially concerning for the Ombudsperson was that Vancouver Island Health Authority did not follow the appropriate process in seeking to close Cowichan Lodge with less than twelve months’ notice.

“Considering the views of residents and their families and allowing for sufficient time to move are reasonable expectations,” says Carter. “Through the efforts of the people who came to us with concerns and complaints, changes have resulted which will assist seniors and families in the future.”

The investigation focused on the following issues:
• Informing residents and family members of the decision to close Cowichan Lodge
• Notifying staff of the decision to close Cowichan Lodge
• The process followed in requesting and granting an exemption to the 12 month notice requirement

Key recommendations include:
• Developing a publicly available policy that sets out the process to follow when closing a facility (R1)
• Considering all relevant factors including employment opportunities and recruitment needs at other facilities that residents might transfer to and where staff might wish to apply when determining a schedule to announce a facility’s closure (R2)
• Fulfilling the legal obligation to provide one year’s notice or seek an exemption to regulatory notice periods when planning a facility closure (R3b)
• Ensuring requests for and decisions about exemptions are posted properly and prominently at affected facilities along with information about how to appeal the decisions (R3d)

In June 2008 the Office of the Ombudsperson received 46 complaints from people in the Cowichan area who were concerned about and directly affected by the announced closure of a long established seniors’ residential care facility in Duncan. As a result of the investigation, Vancouver Island Health Authority has accepted and indicated its commitment to implementing five of the six recommendations made in this report. VIHA indicated it cannot accept the sixth recommendation however, Carter is satisfied that there will be consideration of change on that issue at the provincial level as it has been incorporated into the systemic report into home and community care issues, The Best of Care (Part 2): Getting it Right for Seniors in British Columbia.

The report On Short Notice: An Investigation of Vancouver Island Health Authority's Process for Closing Cowichan Lodge is available at www.bcombudsperson.ca.

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