



CORTES COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSOCIATION

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To the Cortes Community from the Cortes Community Health Association

After almost 2 years of negotiations with Island Health and after working without a contract for over a year and a half, the Cortes physician group has signed a contract for the continuation of the collaborative practice at the Cortes Health Centre.

Unfortunately, the 3 physicians remaining on this contract have also given the CCHA notice that they will all be resigning as the host physicians of this practice as of March 31, 2024. They will be notifying patients, as required by their College, in the coming weeks to say that they will be leaving this practice and that, at this time, there is no one who has agreed to take over their role.

There is no immediate withdrawal of services.

The collaborative practice model developed on Cortes was innovative and was a model for rural health elsewhere in BC. However, the Province's struggle to provide healthcare in BC has created uncertainty in the path to provide rural health care. We recognize that this is a very uncomfortable place for us to be in.

The resignations were prompted by the following factors:

1. The doctors have been working without a contract for the last 18 months and have been in negotiations for the new contract for almost 2 years. We are told that these prolonged and frustrating negotiations have taken a personal toll on our physicians, which they have not let interfere with the excellent care they provide here.

2. Individual physicians are choosing to move along in their lives and establish careers in other places. This has happened several times in the past as physicians have moved to other provinces or retired, but we have not had all the physicians leave at once. Our current physicians have indicated they may return in locum capacity.

3. The Province has changed its funding model, adding fee incentives for longitudinal family medicine that are more lucrative in urban areas. This makes it less attractive for physicians to take on rural practices or to serve as locums in rural areas. This is not because of anything wrong with our Health Centre or our community. The reality is that, as the province struggles with a widespread physician shortage, the financial incentives for rural practice and rural locums are less competitive than before. Our 3 remaining physicians have been working to recruit new members for the practice over the past couple of years, without success, and have been having more difficulty finding locums to fill the open weeks.

4. Medical bureaucracy has increased the workload for doctors and nurses, without giving them adequate time and compensation. We are aware that the demographics and health issues of our population have made delivering medical services on Cortes increasingly complex and time consuming.

This problem on Cortes is a result of the circumstances that all primary healthcare providers are facing. Many rural communities are experiencing the same issues. This is partly a political problem that should put the government under extreme pressure. The Province needs to address the situation in a way that ensures equitable access to health care no matter where you live in the province.

The mandate of the CCHA is to facilitate health care on Cortes. The CCHA's position is that maintaining our Health Centre as a fully staffed primary care center with a stable complement of primary care providers is essential for this community and we will be requesting an urgent meeting with Island Health as soon as possible to find out what plans they have for recruiting physicians to commit to this practice and what we can do to help in this process.

The CCHA will be working diligently with Island Health and our physicians, to provide a continued, sustainable model for healthcare on Cortes Island. We can assure the community that the CCHA will put every effort into a solution to providing continuous physician service on Cortes. We have managed similar situations in the past with good outcomes.

We will be posting regular updates as we work through this. We will let you know how you can help and keep you informed on the progress. We don't have any information other than what we have provided.

We thank you for your support and patience and ask that you respect the need to continue the flow and efficiency of the clinic by not asking to discuss this at your clinic visits.