



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

# NEWS RELEASE

---

► **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**October 11, 2007**

## **Hospital contractor's plan to hire overseas workers points to Bill 29 privatization failure**

*Staffing crisis in hospital support services results from same low-wage strategy that created recent shortages at facilities like Beacon Hill Villa – HEU*

The Hospital Employees' Union is sounding the alarm about plans by multi-national corporation, Compass Group, to hire temporary foreign workers to clean operating rooms and feed patients in Vancouver Island hospitals by year's end.

HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy says the corporation's massive staffing problems are the result of the low wages and inadequate working conditions introduced when the government used *Bill 29* to contract out cleaning and dietary support services to Compass Group.

"The recruitment and retention solution is simple," says Darcy. "The provincial government should require health care contractors to provide living wages to their workers."

Darcy points out that those health authorities who directly employ cleaning and dietary support workers – and provide better wages, benefits and working conditions – do not have the recruitment and retention problems seen by Compass and other sub-contractors in this sector.

The current hourly rate for most Compass Group employees – who perform some of the most dirty and dangerous jobs in health care – is \$12.59 an hour. Cleaners and dietary workers employed directly by health authorities in communities like Campbell River, Kelowna and Prince George earn \$16 to \$17 an hour plus benefits.

Meanwhile, unionized hotel housekeeping staff in Victoria earn between \$14.65 and \$17.56 an hour.

"This latest recruitment crisis is another sign that the government's low-wage privatization policy for health care has failed," says Darcy.

"Government has a choice – they can support a sustainable solution that includes living wages for workers or they can continue to prop up a failed privatization experiment and protect Compass' profits, at the expense of vulnerable foreign workers and patient care."

Under the Temporary Foreign Workers Program, companies can apply to bring workers into Canada for up to two years. Critics say workers recruited under the program are subject to exploitation and abuse and that governments do little to enforce or monitor basic labour standards.

The U.K.-based Compass Group posted \$1.01 billion CDN in operating profits last year.

-30-

*Contact: Mike Old, HEU communications director  
604-828-6771 (cell)*

*Backgrounder attached*

