

Greater Victoria Citizens' Counselling Centre closes it's doors.

Victoria, BC, January 27, 2010: The Greater Victoria Citizens' Counselling Centre will be closing its doors for most counselling services as of end of day today because it has been unable to replace the insurance that was provided by Vancouver Island Health Authority as part of their previous contract. That contract was terminated on December 14 2009 by VIHA citing budgetary reasons. The Centre's insurance went with it.

Shutting the doors of the Centre will see upwards of 100 clients with their appointments cancelled and their counselling cut-off mid stream. "This is really the cruelest part of VIHA's decision to pull our funding." says the agency's Executive Director Brenda Wilson.

VIHA, and government before VIHA's inception, has contracted with the Centre for over thirty years to provide quality, affordable counselling to adults in Greater Victoria. VIHA gave the Centre just two months notice of the cancellation of this contract which has had the agency scrambling to replace or remove 30% of their budget *and* replace the professional liability insurance that was provided with the VIHA contract. The Centre approached VIHA with a proposal to reinstate their contract in any way that would see that the insurance is still provided, but VIHA said no.

"Our volunteer counsellors offer so much to the community. We cannot in good conscience put them, or ourselves, at risk of litigation in any way," says Board chair Sharon Hume. "Our ED, Brenda Wilson, has been working hard to replace the insurance but to date has not been able to find a private insurance carrier that will take it on. We are an anomaly in that we provide this service to so many for so little and by people that have not been certified by a known entity. The insurance companies don't know how to calculate risk when it comes to covering over 100 volunteer counsellors so it is just easier to decline to offer a quote," explains Hume.

Citizens' Counselling Centre provides affordable counselling to over 1200 people a year - and that demand has grown by 25% this year alone. The Centre has over 150 volunteer counsellors that attend to their growing list of clients. Most are people that have taken the Centre's intensive 10-month training program, some are professionals with advanced degrees and training, some are practicum students obtaining graduate degrees in counselling. All offer their service on a volunteer basis and all work under The supervision of the Centre's contracted professional supervisors. The model has been successful at delivering much-needed care to over 21, 000 people since its inception in 1969. This will end today.

Until the Centre has insurance all counselling sessions will be cancelled unless the sessions are provided by counsellors or students or that carry their own professional liability insurance. The Centre currently has about 35 such counsellors and students.

The Centre has been actively campaigning to have the VIHA termination reviewed believing that this decision may have been made without all the information available to VIHA decision makers. Hume adds, "This is a sad day for Victoria when such a well regarded, cost effective and necessary service is forced to suspend services."

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