

May 19, 2021

Cortes Island, Strathcona Regional District

David Leitch, Chief Administrative Officer

Via e-mail:
dleitch@srd.ca

Hello Mr. Leitch,

RE: Scheduled On-Call (SOC) – Vancouver Island / Gulf Islands Prototype

We are pleased to be able to provide an update on how BC Emergency Health Services (BCEHS) is enhancing emergency services in rural and remote communities like yours.

Historically, BCEHS has relied on on-call staffing (often referred to as ‘casual’ in other areas of health care) to maintain ambulance service in small communities. We have been fortunate to have dedicated and committed paramedics in many communities, but this staffing model presents challenges for reliable coverage, pay and career pathways as well as maintaining staff in these communities. Without a regular, predictable income, paramedics seek to move to larger communities to secure full-time work.

As part of the 2019-2022 Collective Agreement between BCEHS and the Ambulance Paramedics and Dispatchers of BC (CUPE Local 873), several initiatives were agreed on to create permanent, salaried jobs for paramedics, including a new staffing model called Scheduled On-Call (SOC). BCEHS and CUPE 873 - the union representing paramedics - have agreed to these changes and the employees themselves ratified the agreement. With plenty of collaboration, joint committees and planning, we are working together to see the successful implementation of this model.

With the introduction of SOC, we will be creating regular part-time SOC unit chief positions at every rural and remote station in BC that does not currently have a regular unit chief. Many areas will also see an expansion of community paramedic services. Introducing the SOC model, as well as changes we are making to convert ‘stand-by’ on-call shifts to regularized positions, where possible, will help stabilize staffing and improve emergency coverage in these communities. These changes are now underway on Vancouver Island and on some Gulf Islands. Other parts of the province are still under analysis and more should be known about those resources later this summer.

Although these changes are exciting and necessary for improvements to happen, we understand there may be impacts and transitional periods along the way. We are talking with our staff and providing as much information as we can during this time of change and encouraging those interested in regular work to apply for the many permanent positions being created. Overall, the SOC model will be creating more than 170 regular positions across the province. In addition, BCEHS has also invested and implemented changes to other staffing and scheduling models to improve patient care. These initiatives are adding hundreds of new regular positions across the province.

The intent of all these changes is to increase the number of regular positions in smaller communities, provide stable employment for paramedics and opportunities to further their careers in these communities. For residents in these communities, SOC aims to provide more consistent emergency health coverage along with new opportunities for paramedic support to local health services.

This kind of transformation is the largest ever undertaken by our organization and one that we expect will better integrate with community health services and enhance our services to patients in a variety of ways.

If you would like more information, we would be happy to meet with you virtually. Alternatively, you can email MyCommunity@bcehs.ca for more information.

Sincerely,

Signed by

Darlene MacKinnon
Chief Operating Officer
BC Emergency Health Services