

For Immediate Release
October 10, 2006

LEAKED MEMO REVEALS VIHA SILENCING HEALTH CARE STAFF

VICTORIA—A leaked memo obtained by the NDP Opposition reveals that the Vancouver Island Health Authority (VIHA) is telling staff to stop speaking to elected officials and the media, Saanich-South NDP MLA David Cubberley said today.

“On the same day the Conversation on Health gets underway in Vancouver, VIHA is ordering staff to stop talking to both politicians and the media,” said Cubberley. “Input from health care professionals is crucial to improving our public health care system. And VIHA is sending staff the wrong message by telling them to stop sharing their stories.”

The memorandum, circulated to managers and staff on September 25, instructs VIHA employees to refer all media requests to a central communications office. The memo also specified that questions from elected officials, including MLAs or MPs, be directed to VIHA’s Director of Operations.

“The public deserves to know what’s going on in our health care system,” said Cubberley. “And the professional staff at VIHA should be encouraged to speak out, if they so choose. But if they have to go through a central communications office before doing so, people will begin to wonder if they are getting a sanitized version of the facts.”

“We need real people to come forward and contribute to the Premier’s Conversation on Health,” said NDP Health critic Adrian Dix. “That includes professionals working in the health care system. And if the Premier’s Conversation is going to be truly open, then doctors and nurses and local health authority officials should be able to speak freely.”

- 30 -