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CHHA - YK

Canadian Hard of Hearing Association
Yellowknife Branch

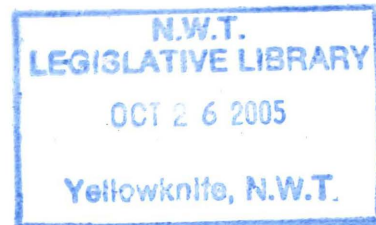
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October 23, 2005

The Honourable Michael Miltenberger,
Minister, Health & Social Services,
Government of the Northwest Territories,
YELLOWKNIFE, NT X1A 2L9



Dear Mr. Miltenberger:

This letter is written as an expression of grave concern by the YK Branch of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA – YK Branch) that as of October 31st, 2005 the Northwest Territories will not have any resident audiologists. Over the past 5 years there has often been only one audiologist to provide care for the entire Northwest Territories and western Nunavut and it is the contention of CHHA – YK Branch that this is unacceptable.

In a recent federal/provincial/territorial partnership which is funded by Health Canada it is advertised that "governments are working across Canada to improve Primary Health Care: basic, everyday health care for every Canadian....The other pillars of Primary Health Care are...Access – You have access to the right care at the right time." With no audiologists in the Northwest Territories, **residents do not have the access to the right care at the right time with respect to their hearing**, which we feel is a basic, everyday health problem for many residents.

We understand that efforts to recruit an audiologist(s) are ongoing but to date the position(s) have not been filled. We further understand that one offer of employment had recently been made but was declined. Audiologists in the Northwest Territories are not only required to provide services within a clinical environment, but are also required to be away for extended periods for travel to remote locations for clinics.

A recent salary survey was conducted by the Canadian Association of Speech-Language Pathologists & Audiologists (CASLPA) in 2005 and a cross-section of their findings are as follows:

BC & Territories	\$65,811.15
Ontario	\$71,948.16
MB/SK	\$60,502.00

Capital Health in Alberta (Edmonton) has a salary cap higher than the Northwest Territories.

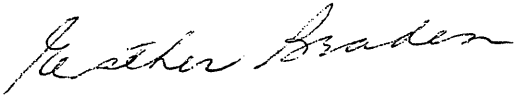
However, in reading the various career ads posted on the CASLPA website for audiologists throughout Canada, the positions advertised did not require travel of any kind. It is our position that the compensation offered by the Government of the Northwest Territories does not adequately reflect the additional duties and costs that audiologists incur as a result of living in the Northwest Territories. To further support our position is attached a copy of an article printed in the February 8, 2002 issue of the *Yellowknifer* by Dawn Doig, audiologist.

We urge the Government of the Northwest Territories to review the compensation package offered to audiologists as well as aggressively pursue the hiring of at least two (2) audiologists.

We would be pleased to schedule a meeting with you to further discuss our concerns.

Yours very truly,

CANADIAN HARD OF HEARING
ASSOCIATION – YK BRANCH



Esther Braden,
President.

Copy: All MLAs

Rod Izzard
Manager of Clinical Services
& Physician Specialist Recruitment

Health professionals of equal value

Northern News Services:

I am writing in response to the editorial "The high cost of quality care" (*Yellowknife*, Feb. 1) where it was noted that support staff at the Stanton Regional Hospital were "upset at recruitment and retention bonuses paid to registered nurses and doctors."

It was also stated that "The people who do these jobs are no less valuable" BUT "there's no staffing crisis in these jobs." As one of those people, this latter comment really hit a nerve.

You see, I am currently the 'only' audiologist serving the Northwest Territories and western Nunavut. I have been in Yellowknife since

July 2000, and since September 2000 we have been unsuccessful in recruiting a second qualified audiologist, who is desperately needed.

I travel throughout the NWT and western Nunavut, and while I am away there is no one available to cover the Yellowknife clinic. This means people with auditory concerns or those experiencing difficulties with their hearing aids must wait until I am back in town. People do not realize how often I travel (a lot of time away from my young family) and they do not realize that I am alone.

People complain about having to wait anywhere up to three months for an appointment with me. Often the delay is not just to see me, but many

of these appointments must be coordinated with the ear, nose and throat specialists who also travel.

What people do not realize is that when I worked in Nanaimo, B.C. — from 1990 to 1992 — the waiting list for a child to get a hearing assessment was six months and for an adult it was three years!

The provincial health clinic in Nanaimo no longer sees adults. Adults must now pay to go to private practice audiologists. People also do not realize that they would be waiting at least six months for the same audiological services in Edmonton (often longer at the hospital clinics).

What people, in general, do not realize is that in order to work as an

audiologist one must minimally have a master's degree in Human Communication Disorders.

There are five universities in Canada that offer this degree (one is French), with a maximum class size of approximately eight students each. That is approximately 40 audiologists graduating in Canada per year. There were five graduates from my class.

GUEST COMMENT



Dawn Doig has been the only fully-qualified audiologist in the NWT for the last year and a half.

Other offers

There are currently jobs for audiologists all over the country. When I graduated 12 years ago, I wondered if I would have a job. Now I can pretty much choose where I want to go and when I want to go.

This past September I was considering leaving Yellowknife and immediately had job offers in Edmonton and Singapore. I thought I would take a pay cut by going south, so you can imagine my surprise when the offer at the hospital in Edmonton included a substantial pay raise.

There are a number of reasons I chose to stay in Yellowknife for now. I love my job and I work with a terrific group of people, but some days the stress can be overwhelming.

I have actively tried to recruit colleagues to

Yellowknife, but as interested as some might be, the reasons for not coming are always the same:

- a) They can make the same pay down south or in an urban centre
- b) They are not isolated
- c) They do not have to travel

There are exceptional demands on audiologists in the North due to the high prevalence of middle ear disease, fetal alcohol syndrome and/or central auditory processing disorders, noise-induced hearing loss, etc.

Knowledge and experience

The position(s) at the Stanton Medical Centre is unique in that the audiologist must have knowledge AND experience in every aspect of audiology.

Audiologists in facilities down south and in general tend to be able to specialize in certain areas, so the demands are much less in that respect.

From my experience to date, I feel the people of the NWT are very fortunate to have such a variety of qualified and experienced professionals available for services.

Quality of life is what brings many of them here, but acknowledgment — i.e. the same form of recruitment/retention incentives, etc. — that they are just as vital as other professionals deemed more difficult to recruit, will go a long way to keeping them here.

Dawn Doig: Audiologist since 2000

These have been the two most stressful years of my life. The hospital has lost their last two audiologists to burnout.

At one time I was seeing up to 12 patients a day. Recently I clamped down and said I am only seeing seven a day and urgent cases, should they arise.

I cover all of the NWT and western Nunavut. I travelled 52 days last year.

Everyone who gets a hearing aid in the NWT comes to me.

How can we fill the department vacancy when in Alberta audiologists only see six to eight adult clients a day. Here we administer every hearing test available, and to all age groups.

Clinics in Alberta are offering almost \$10,000 more than the GNWT. If they changed the salaries and benefits we would have someone here tomorrow.