

# The Assistant

B.C. Association of Legal Assistants (BCALA)

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## 2003 SALARY SURVEY RESULTS ARE IN

*By Christine Uhrmann, newsletter editor*

The 2003 BCALA Salary Survey produced 132 responses., out of 214 surveys mailed out. The response rate was up from 84 responses received for the 2002 Salary Survey.

Out of the 132 responses received, 117 respondents work in a Law Firm, 7 in a Corporation, 4 in a Government office and 5 in other environments, unfortunately the 5 "other" respondents did not indicate what their work environment consisted of.

127 of the respondents are currently employed, while 5 were unemployed or moving to a new employer.

116 Respondents work full time, 9 part time and 7 under contract.

6 Respondents have been employed for less than 1 year. 40 Respondents have been employed as a Paralegal/Legal Assistant for 1 to 4 years; while 31 Respondents have been employed from 5 to 9 years. 23 Respondents fell into the category of being employed for 10 to 15 years. 13 Respondents have been employed for more than 15 years. Finally, 9 Respondents have been working as a Paralegal/Legal Assistant for more than 25 years.

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***New Name***

During the April 2004 AGM, it was determined that the Association would proceed with changing the name of the BCALA. In May, the Board submitted a name reservation, with the Registry of Companies, for the following: B.C. Paralegal Association and B.C. Paralegal Institute.

In the coming months, an EGM will be held to allow the membership to vote on the name change and approve new by-laws.

In addition to renaming the Association, we are seeking suggestions for the newsletter's new name.

Please submit your suggestions to the newsletter editor at [cru\\_bcala@yahoo.ca](mailto:cru_bcala@yahoo.ca). If your suggestion is chosen you will receive a prize from the Board.

**SALARY SURVEY RESULTS (CONTINUED)**

Education

89 of the Respondents have at least 2 years of post secondary education. 28 Respondents have a Bachelor's degree and 15 of the Respondents have a high school education.

Billable Hours

53 Respondents have an hourly billable rate of \$50-100. 37 Respondents have an hourly billable rate of \$100-150, while only 7 Respondents have an hourly billable rate in excess of \$150.00.

92 Respondents are required to bill hours, while 40 respondents do not have billable targets.

Firm Size

60 Respondents work in a firm with 1-10 lawyers and 91 Respondents in firms with 1-10 Paralegals.

15 Respondents work with 10-20 lawyers, 20 Respondents in firms with 20-50 lawyers, 20 Respondents in firms with 50-100 lawyers and 13 Respondents in firms with over 100 lawyers.

19 Respondents work in firms with 10-20 Paralegals, and 20 Respondents in firms with an excess of 20 Paralegals.

This result indicates that the majority of our responses to the salary survey are coming from smaller firms where the potential for consistency amongst Paralegals is less likely.

Overtime

57 Respondents are paid for overtime, while 73 Respondents are not paid overtime. 2 Respondents provided no answer.

Benefits

The Salary Survey provided a list of benefits which the Respondents could indicate were provided by the firm. Each benefit is listed here with the number of Respondents who receive that benefit:

Medical	91
Life Insurance	87
Dental	102
Disability	86
Vision	48
Pension	38
Extended Medical	104
Legal Representation	35

10 Respondents indicated that they did not receive benefits. This was primarily due to contract work and received pay in lieu of.

Vacation and Sick Days

The following is a breakdown of the vacation and sick day distribution among the 132 Respondents:

A. Vacation

- 1 - 13 days: 9 Respondents
- 14 - 20 days: 89 Respondents
- 21+ days: 27 Respondents

4 Respondents indicated that they do not have formal vacation time. Again, this was due to contract work. 1 Respondent indicated that their vacation time was negotiable.

B. Sick Days

- 0 days: 13 Respondents
- 1 - 4 days: 10 Respondents
- 5 - 10 days: 72 Respondents
- 10+ days: 12 Respondents

7 Respondents indicated negotiable sick day time, while 16 Respondents recorded an "unknown" response.

Salary & Bonus

With respect to the Bonus question, there was an equal divide in the responses that were obtained. 53 Respondents do receive a bonus, while 53 Respondents do not receive a bonus. 25 Respondents provided no answer.

As with the responses obtained in previous years, there appears to be no clear trend in the salaries that are paid to Paralegals. Such that the salary is commensurate with years of experience, area of law or educational background. The following is a breakdown of the responses received:

- Less than \$30,000.00 4 Respondents
- \$30,000.00-\$35,000.00 8 Respondents
- \$35,000.00-\$40,000.00 15 Respondents
- \$40,000.00-\$45,000.00 19 Respondents
- \$45,000.00-\$50,000.00 42 Respondents
- \$50,000.00-\$55,000.00 24 Respondents
- \$55,000.00-\$60,000.00 10 Respondents
- \$60,000.00+ 4 Respondents

1 Respondent indicated an income of \$75,000.00. This individual works in a contract basis, indicating that they work approximately 60 hours a week. They work in the area of corporate/securities and have been employed as a Legal Assistant/Paralegal for 6 years.

Commentary

The BCALA is quite pleased with the increase in response to the 2003 Salary Survey. As the Association continues to work towards greater recognition and certification of Paralegals within B.C., it is necessary to obtain a clear picture of the environments and circumstances in which Paralegals are employed.

The 2003 survey did not contain the number of written comments by members as previous years. The comments we did receive indicate that Legal Assistants/Paralegals are satisfied with their current work environment. However there is clear support for certification and moving the profession towards greater recognition and within the field of law.

We thank you for your comments and contribution to the annual survey results.

Charterhouse Medico Ltd.

Diana Simmons has 25 years of experience reviewing medical charts during her nursing career. She obtained further training from the Legal Nurse Consulting Institute in Texas. She no longer practices nursing instead turning to healthcare litigation consulting services to law offices and insurance companies.



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## Medical News You Can Use

### Medical Records

Cases involving medical malpractice, personal injury, workers' compensation, and environmental toxins are on the rise, often resulting in piles of medical records to sort through. Details found within the record can make or break a case by way of "preserving the truth", and a thorough review of all records can provide a justifiable defense if one exists.

The fundamental basis of any healthcare facility is the medical record, where all members of the team are able to communicate patient care and treatment decisions. A complete and legible medical record contains vital information about an individual's confidential medical condition, and provides an accurate chronological history of the care he or she received. This information is then used to: facilitate quality of care among physicians and other healthcare professionals, monitor compliance with professional Standards of Care and institutional regulations, collect data for research studies and education, and provide evidence for legal matters.

Every facility has its preferred style of charting and forms, however, no one format will cover all situations and staff often develop individual forms and flow sheets to record specific incidences., Some forms may not be included as part of a patient's record, and could be stored elsewhere in the facility. Regardless of which forms are used a complete record must include:

- + The patient's chief complaint
- + A review of past and present injuries or illnesses, with risk factors identified
- + Physical examination findings
- + Appropriate consents for treatment
- + Why particular diagnostic tests are necessary, and the results of those tests
- + A clinical impression or diagnosis
- + The type of care provided, and the patient's response to treatment
- + Discharge and follow-up care instructions, including any prescribed medications

### Charting Styles

When reviewing a medical record, it is important to be aware of the different styles of charting. Clinical information may be documented in one or more of the following ways:

#### SOAP/SOAPIE Charting:

This is the most common and logical form of documenting medical information, and is frequently used by physicians in emergency, acute care, and long-term care settings. It consists of baseline data, a problem list, a plan of care for each problem, and progress notes, in the following way:

- S = Subjective data gathered by listening to the patient or family members
- O = Objective, factual, and measurable information gathered during a physical exam
- A = Assessment of the patient's problems with conclusions/summary
- P = Plan of care or treatment with recommended therapies and interventions
- I = Intervention by a healthcare worker, documented as care is provided
- E = Evaluation of the plan and modification if needed

## Focus Charting:

A form of charting used primarily by nurses, and often seen on intensive care units. The "focus" is not a medical diagnosis, but rather a statement of observation, such as "decreased urine output", or "pain management". Flow sheets and checklists are used which eliminate the need for time-consuming documentation. They are an excellent means of charting routine observations and useful in spotting trends or sudden changes.

## Numbered Charting:

Also primarily used by nurses. The patient's problems are numbered sequentially on initial assessment, and then continually used throughout subsequent assessments. The disadvantage is that nurses often have to locate the initial assessment in order to decode the numbers designated to each problem.

## Narrative Charting:

This style is widely used in rehabilitation centers, long-term care, and homecare settings. Physicians, nurses, physiotherapists, and social workers chart in their own section of the record. Entries are hand-written, without an organizing structure. Some may be brief, while others may be quite extensive and information is often repeated. Gaining an overall picture, tracking problems and following trends, can be time-consuming.

## Charting By Exception:

This style of charting requires specifically designed forms and flow sheets for documenting significant findings or exceptions. When the patient responds within the norm, as outlined in the patient care plan, a tick is placed in the appropriate box. When the response is outside the norm, this is "an exception" and explained in more detail in the progress notes.

## Computerized Charting:

Computers are seen more frequently in medical facilities, and are likely to become the principal method for maintaining patient records. Once the software program is learned, staff can quickly access lab results, review doctors orders, and document treatments, which then allows them to have more hands-on time with their patients.

A medical record may contain only a few simple pages, or it may be quite lengthy and complex. Much of it may be hand-written with unfamiliar terms, symbols, and numbers, and without knowledge of medical terminology, may be difficult to decipher. Understanding the different styles of charting and referring to a good medical dictionary and medication reference guide will help clarify issues.

Look in the next issue for more Medical News you can Use from Charterhouse Medico.

On April 16, 2004, BCALA Director Christine Uhrmann traveled to Kelowna to attend the 28th Annual Legal Secretaries and Support Staff Convention. This is an event that has a long history in Kelowna, with quite a friendly rivalry as to which team can put on a bigger party each year. Each year, at the end of the Convention, all of the local firm names are put into a hat and the name of next year's planner is drawn, then that the ball is passed. Quite literally, a bronzed ball is passed off to the next team to begin planning for the following years event. The 28th Annual Convention had a Hawaiian theme and was hosted by the law firm of Kendall, Penty & Co. Each attendee received a Hawaiian lei as they arrived and were entertained by Hawaiian dancers during the evening. This is a great event that receives considerable support from the Kelowna community. It was a pleasure to be invited and to meet our Kelowna Director, Esther Van Leening. The BCALA would like to welcome Esther to the Board, and encourage local paralegals, and anyone interested in the paralegal profession, to contact Esther.

On May 12, 2004, the Canadian Association of Paralegals, along with co-hosts the BCALA, held the very first CAP conference in Vancouver, with tremendous success. The afternoon sessions saw such topics as the B.C. Business Corporations Act, E-filings, Managing Electronic Documents, the Privacy Act, Support for legal support staff. In addition, it was a pleasure to have Mr. Brian J. Wallace, Q.C. Law Society Benchler and Patricia Tunstall, CAP President, speak on paralegalism in B.C. and across Canada. Patricia provided a comprehensive overview of the paralegal profession in all regions of Canada. Showing that the profession is indeed growing in numbers and in its profile. Finally, the evening was capped off with a fantastic dinner, courtesy of the Pan Pacific Hotel staff, and a keynote address from the Honourable Geoff Plant, Attorney General of B.C. and Minister Responsible for Treaty Negotiations. Mr. Plant spoke on the topic of Access to Justice and the role of paralegals in today's legal services. CAP and BCALA would like to extend its deepest thanks to each of the speakers, Mr. Plant, each of the volunteers and attendees, for making this event very successful.

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## IDEAS, SUGGESTIONS... WE WANT THEM.

Do you know of, or have great ideas for, upcoming events, seminars, social functions that would be of interest to the BCALA?

Give us a call, or send an email to [info@bcala.com](mailto:info@bcala.com).

We would love to hear from you!!!

Have you come across an article, news clip, funny anecdote that you would like to share?

Do you have publishing or graphic design experience?

The newsletter committee needs YOU!! Contact Christine Uhrmann at [cru\\_bcala@yahoo.ca](mailto:cru_bcala@yahoo.ca) to find out how you can get involved or how to submit your articles, photos, or news clips.

The BCALA Board of Directors would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to each of the following directors who have contributed greatly to the Association during their time on the Board, and over the past year. Your experience and dedication to the profession is greatly appreciated.

*Thank You*

Jasbir Bains— President of the BCALA from April 1996 To April 2004.

Gemma Hale—Treasurer from Oct 1997 To April 2004

Ann Halkett, Matthew Lougheed, and Mindi Coffman.



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