



Tentative agreement reached for health science professionals

January 31, 2013

After almost a year of bargaining for a new contract, the Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association (HSPBA) has reached a tentative agreement for nearly 17,000 health science professionals working in hospitals and communities across British Columbia.

"In yet another very difficult bargaining climate, our priority was to achieve fair and reasonable wages for our members, and to continue to provide the quality health care services British Columbians rely on," said HSA President Reid Johnson.

"While it has been a very rocky ride, including three days of rotating strikes in December, we have reached some significant achievements for our members. Our bargaining committee has worked hard to make important improvements for members that will result in improvements to the system," he said.

The tentative agreement includes wage increases totaling 3 per cent, and makes permanent a market adjustment of between 9 and 14% over and above the basic wage rates for pharmacists. It also achieves fairness for all members of the modern health care team by finally recognizing the work and commitment of the team of health science professionals who are there – day or night – to perform the life-saving services that keep British Columbians alive in medical emergencies. The provisions that protect the health and safety of health science professionals in short supply who often work on call, and fairly compensate those who work extraordinary shifts to deliver critical services, are a long-fought for recognition of contribution of these members of the modern health care team.

"The tentative agreement is in line with other B.C. public sector health contracts negotiated in the past several months, and protects wages that had been threatened for highly trained members of the health care team. While helping to control costs in the health care system, it preserves core benefits to support the continued health and wellness of the members of the modern health care team who deliver the health care services British Columbians count on every day," said Val Avery, chair of the HSPBA bargaining committee, and a physiotherapist at Victoria General Hospital.

The agreement brings a return to a 37.5 hour work week for health science professionals, who have for the past several years worked a 36-hour week.

The tentative agreement was achieved after two weeks of intensive discussions facilitated by mediator Vince Ready, and as HSA was surveying its members about a provocative "last offer" the government tabled in December. After that offer was tabled, HSPBA stepped away from bargaining to consult members about next steps.

Almost 4,000 HSA members completed a survey in the past two weeks, and resoundingly rejected the government's December proposals calling for a many concessions, including unprecedented reductions in benefits, and a wholesale gutting of the classification system which could have resulted in wage roll-backs.

The tentative agreement reached today includes a commitment to a Pharmacare tie-in which is comparable to pharmaceutical coverage offered by BC Pharmacare, and a joint process to realize savings in extended benefit coverage. In exchange, union members will benefit from the return of a pay-direct card instead of the current system of reimbursement of payment for prescribed drugs.

The tentative agreement covers more than 17,000 health science professionals who deliver health care services in BC hospitals and communities.

A majority of health science professionals are represented by the Health Sciences Association of BC. Other unions in the Association are the BC Government and Service Employees Union, Professional Employees Association, Canadian Union of Public Employees and Hospital Employees' Union.

The HSPBA bargaining committee unanimously voted to recommend acceptance of the tentative agreement, which expires March 31, 2014. Each of the member unions will consider the recommendation of the bargaining committee as they prepare to take the agreement to a vote by members covered by the contract.

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