



BULLETIN

Health services workers strike

December 6, 2012

Nanaimo News Bulletin

Byline: Niomi Pearson

A two-day strike by health care workers at Nanaimo Regional General Hospital and across the province will mean a delay in services for some residents.

After nine months of contract negotiations and serving strike notice to B.C. employers, the Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association (HSPBA) announced that job action will commence today and tomorrow (Dec. 6-7).

Starting at 9 a.m. today, hospital pharmacists will reduce work to essential services only. At midnight, the rotating strike action will move to all medical and diagnostic imaging, such as MRI, mammography, sonography and CT scans, with staff performing only essential services. Public health inspectors will also reduce services.

Val Wilson, regional manager of communications for the Vancouver Island Health Authority, said the exact impact of the strike on local facilities such as NRGH is unknown.

"This could mean patients' diagnostic tests, surgery or other procedures may be delayed or rescheduled," she said. "There won't be any picket lines, so patients won't have to cross a picket line to come to NRGH or any other VIHA facility, and our emergency department will remain open as usual."

The Health Sciences Association, the largest union within the HSPBA, sent out a news release Wednesday, stating that mediator Vince Ready was brought in Tuesday to join contract negotiations this week. However, members are frustrated with the offer brought forward late Tuesday, said HSA president Reid Johnson.

"It's taken nine months and the threat of job action and the imposition of a mediator for the employer to finally come with an offer," Reid said. "This employer is bound and determined to claw back benefits from health-care workers and impose a wage settlement that is less than people out in the public sector.

"The job action is going ahead because after all of this, we're still far, far away."

The HSPBA is made up of health care professionals such as lab imaging technicians, pharmacists, dieticians, radiation therapists and physiotherapists.

On average, they require the second-highest level of post-secondary education, next to doctors and nurses, Reid said.

"Our members are making \$6 to \$13 less than other jurisdictions across the country and the private sector," he said.

The Health Employers Association of B.C. also sent out a news release Wednesday, stating, "employers remain hopeful that they can soon come to an agreement with HSPBA, as three out of five agreements in the health sector have been reached to date under the cooperative gains mandate."

An information bulletin posted to VIHA's website advises patients not to call in to check their scheduled appointments.

"That will allow our phone lines to remain open for any urgent calls that come in," Wilson said. "We'll be contacting anyone who may experience a delay or need to be rescheduled."

Services are expected to resume as normal on Saturday (Dec. 8).

To read VIHA's information bulletin, please visit www.viha.ca.

2012 Nanaimo News Bulletin

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