



BULLETIN

Health workers call off action

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Times Colonist (Victoria)

This week's anticipated cancellation of medical procedures in Vancouver Island hospitals was called off Sunday, but the dispute between health professionals and their employers continues.

After three days of talks overseen by veteran labour mediator Vince Ready, members of the Health Sciences Association of B.C. charged Sunday that they are being goaded into a strike by the government's bargaining group, the Health Employers Association of B.C.

The association issued a statement saying that the provincial government is offering a general wage increase of 1.4 per cent over two years, while some health-care workers could be facing wage rollbacks.

The bargaining team is taking the offer back to its 14,500 members, who have been without a contract since 2009. In the meantime, the health professionals' association has called off rotating strikes that began Thursday.

"We're pleased they called off the job action and we're anxious to get back to the table," said Michael Marchbank, president of the the Health Employers Association of B.C.

Reid Johnson, president of the Health Sciences Association, will ask his members what they want to do next.

"We now know exactly what government thinks of the value of health-science professionals in the public health-care system, and we're going to share that with our members," he said.

Job action so far had only affected non-essential services. The retail pharmacy at Royal Jubilee Hospital was closed last week after about 60 per cent of pharmacy staff in hospitals booked off work.

Rotating strikes had been expected to continue in the coming week.

As of Monday evening, staff were able to rebook about 60 per cent of the services.

Vancouver Island Health Authority spokeswoman Suzanne Germain had said Sunday that staff would not be able to restore full services on such short notice.

"It isn't like a light switch that you can just switch back on," she said.

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