



# Paramedical professionals to issue 72-hour strike notice

January 4, 1999

## **Unions say mediation has been a "complete waste of time"**

The Paramedical Professional Bargaining Association today announced that it will issue 72-hour strike notice to the Health Employers' Association of BC on Tuesday, January 5. Cindy Stewart, President of the Health Sciences Association of BC (HSA), says HEABC's intransigence at the bargaining table leaves the unions with no other choice.

"Our bargaining team welcomed the opportunity to participate in mediation because we wanted to negotiate a fair contract without job action," says Stewart. "But to date, mediation has been a complete waste of time. Despite Brian Foley's best efforts, HEABC and the provincial government have made it clear they are prepared to risk further disruption in the health care system rather than engage in meaningful negotiations."

Stewart says during the two days of mediation before Christmas, HEABC refused to back off their concession demands and failed to address any of the union's key bargaining proposals. She says the unions will continue mediation this week but will initiate job action as early as next week if talks are not more productive.

"HEABC and the provincial government have shown that they will not engage in serious negotiations until they are facing a crisis situation," says Stewart. "This is unfair to patients and it is unfair to our members."

Stewart says HEABC's concession demands would gut the union's classification system and allow employers to unilaterally reassign employees and alter hours of work. HEABC is also refusing to address the bargaining association's key proposals including: provincial seniority, long-term disability, compensation for on-call and parity for community-based health professionals.

The Paramedical Professional Bargaining Association represents over 10,000 health care professionals across the province, including: lab technologists, x-ray technologists, pharmacists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, respiratory therapists, preschool teachers, community mental health professionals, social workers, dietitians, health records administrators, alcohol and drug counsellors, speech and language pathologists and public health inspectors.

HSA is the lead union in the Paramedical Professional Bargaining Association. Also represented are the BC Government Employees Union, Canadian Union of Public Employees, Professional Employees Association, Hospital Employees Union, and United Food and Commercial Workers.

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### ***For more information contact:***

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### **Backgrounder**

#### ***Key issues still outstanding:***

**The employer's concession demands** HEABC has put forward a number of concession demands that would turn back the clock on our current collective agreement. For example, HEABC is trying to flatten our classification system to only three levels (A,B and C) in an effort to limit opportunities for paramedical professionals to advance in their professions. HSA fought hard for our current classification system - one that

encourages health care professionals to build their skills and experience. It is a central part of what makes our collective agreement meaningful to members but HEABC wants to take it away.

**Compensation for on-call** This is not just an issue for doctors and nurses. Many of our members, particularly those in rural communities, are forced to spend hours by the phone with virtually no compensation. Our members currently receive \$1.25 an hour to be on call - a rate that has not increased in ten years. For many members, being on-call actually costs them money because they must spend several dollars an hour to ensure a babysitter is available if necessary.

This situation has become untenable for thousands of our members but HEABC is refusing to find a solution. The provincial government has developed a plan to address the concerns of on-call physicians. It is time HEABC and the provincial government recognized the sacrifices that all health care workers make to ensure that patients can access care when they need it.

**Long-term disability** This is an issue of equity but HEABC is refusing to budge. HSA wants to transfer our long-term disability plan back to the Health Benefits Trust, the employer-paid plan that covers all other health care workers in the system. The current situation prevents health care professionals from moving freely within an amalgamated health care system.

**Provincial seniority** This would allow paramedical professionals to move from one facility to another without losing their accumulated seniority. We believe provincial seniority is absolutely critical in light of the extensive restructuring that has occurred, and will continue to occur, in the health care system. As it stands, health employers are wasting valuable health care dollars on recruitment and relocation costs to bring paramedical professionals from out of province because our members are unable to relocate without facing a major penalty.

**Levelling** Historically, paramedical professionals who work in community-based facilities have received lower wages and benefits than those in the acute care sector. We believe that paramedical professionals who perform the same job should receive the same wages and benefits regardless of where they work. This issue should have been addressed in the last round of negotiations but health employers are continuing to drag their heels.

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