

BULLETIN

HSA calls on HEABC to rescind notice of wage rollback for pharmacists

January 26, 2012

Health Sciences Association (HSA), on behalf of the Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association, called on the Health Employers Association of BC (HEABC) in a meeting today to rescind the notice it gave earlier this month that it plans to roll back hospital pharmacists wages by as much as \$12,000 a year.

Jeanne Meyers, HSAs executive director of legal services and labour relations, said the wage rollback is short-sighted.

"We have ... as have the Premier, the Minister of Health, and the health authority executives -- received feedback from hundreds of pharmacists about the consequences that eliminating competitive wage schedules would have on the health care system," she said.

HSA has asked to meet with the Minister of Health, Mike de Jong, to make the case for protection of pharmacy services and patient care.

"It is important that the Minister of Health understand that without critical members of the modern health care team, patients will suffer," Meyers said.

"The market adjustment was introduced in 2006 to address a crisis in recruitment and retention ... BC hospitals were not able to attract the specialized and critical expertise they needed in clinical pharmacists. The draw to retail pharmacy ... where wages are substantially higher ... and to other jurisdictions, with higher wages and a lower cost of living was strong, and the solution was to offer fair market.

"Eliminate the fair market wages, and were right back to where we were. Only this time, it will be worse, as other jurisdictions have continued to pull ahead of BC on wages," Meyers said.

More than 800 letters have been sent to the Premier and Minister of Health calling on government to reverse HEABCs decision. The strong message is that without pharmacists, who are critical members of the modern health care team, patient care is at risk. Following are just a few excerpts from those letters:

â€¢ -Hospital pharmacists do more than count pills and dispense drugs. They ensure the best possible clinical care and treatment of patients, including advising doctors on medications. They prepare chemotherapy drugs. They collaborate with other health professionals in educating and caring for patients."

â€¢ -In particular, as a pharmacist working in the specialty area of Oncology, we work in an environment where it is especially difficult to attract qualified individuals. Moreover, the toxic and hazardous nature of the chemotherapy medications that we deliver at the BC Cancer Agency requires a pharmacist's due diligence and expertise to ensure that medication errors and adverse events are prevented. A single error caught by a pharmacist can prevent devastating consequences leading to morbidity and mortality."

â€¢ -As a physician, I witness the vitally important role hospital pharmacists play on a daily basis. They are instrumental for ensuring patient safety, education and bridging the gap when patients are transitioned back

to the community.

-From a personal perspective, when my mother was hospitalized • it was the hospital pharmacist who ensured that all her medications were administered on time, noted which ones interacted and had to be replaced, and it was the pharmacist who caught numerous medical • She also answered all our questions when no one on the medical teams were available."

â€¢ -To summarize in just one sentence what hospital pharmacists do: we ensure the safe, rational and economical use of medication.

-Hospital pharmacists are specialists in the same way physicians are specialists. At Children's Hospital my colleagues and I are specialists in: General Pediatric, Oncology, AIDS and HIV, obstetrics, Infomatics, Neonatology, Intensive Care, Cardiology, Neurology, Cystic Fibrosis, Drug Information, Drug Utilization and Evaluation, Nephrology, and Solid Organ Transplant."

HSA members are encouraged to support the unions fight for fair wages for the modern health care team by visiting pharmacistsmatter.ca, and adding their voice to the call for continued quality health services for all British Columbians.

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