

BULLETIN

HEABC brings concessionary demands to health science professionals bargaining table in week that government mulls wage freezes

September 14, 2012

Bargaining for a new Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association collective agreement resumed this week against the backdrop of a pessimistic pronouncement by BC's Minister of Finance, Hon. Mike de Jong, about the state of the province's finances. Once again, a finance minister is revising predictions that called for a rosy future and sombrely telling British Columbians that the deficit is on the rise, and costs have to be contained.

In the government's quarterly financial update Thursday, de Jong said the province will be reviewing its current bargaining mandate, which restricts any wage increase in public sector collective agreements to "cooperative gains." That is, in order to fund any increased costs associated with wages, savings must be found somewhere in the system to pay for the people who deliver the service.

"While we continue to discuss substantive contract issues that affect health science professionals, the bargaining committee will be paying close attention to any developments on the government's mandate," said HSPBA's chief negotiator Jeanne Meyers. "The reality is that health science professionals in British Columbia continue to fall behind the wage standards of their peers across the country. Any move by the government to continue to force them to fall behind spells disaster for the potential to recruit and keep the health science professionals who are integral to the modern health care team here in BC," she said.

In bargaining this week the Union provided a substantive response to HEABC's classification proposal. The proposal would delete the existing system, replacing it with an entirely new system which does not provide guarantees of adequate supervision, clinical direction, or practice leadership ... all of which would remain at the discretion of the employer.

While the union has for years advocated for a substantial overhaul of the classifications system to more accurately reflect the nature of the specialized work of health science professionals, the bargaining committee made it clear that a change to the system does not mean an opportunity for the employer to undervalue the work of members. HSPBA proposal provides for full retroactivity for any upgrades described in the employer's proposal. The collective agreement expired more than five months ago (March 31, 2012).

In other bargaining developments this week, HEABC negotiators tabled proposals which include:

• A change to the definition of part-time status, which would require a minimum number of hours worked per week of 14.4 hours. This is a concessionary demand. The union successfully negotiated

the removal of minimum hours from the definition of part-time in the 1980s. This was to support employees with family responsibilities which may prevent them from working full time, and to support employees with family responsibilities which may prevent them from maintaining full-time positions.

Â· A return to language which would recognize the principle of seniority as only a tie-breaker in cases of promotion, demotion or transfer. This is a concessionary demand.

Â· Elimination of the Final Offer Selection process as a means of dispute resolution where there are challenges to shift schedules. Under the HEABCs proposal the Employers proposed schedule just prevails if employees cannot be persuaded to accept it.

The HSPBA tabled language which would:

Â· Extend the provisions of Article 18 (parental leave) to adoptive parents and same-sex parents.

Â· Continue the Professional Development fund on a funding formula of \$225,000 per collective agreement year.

Â· Provide for increased paid union steward time in facilities of greater than 300 FTE.

To date, there has been no substantive response from HEABC on any union proposals with monetary implications nor has the employer provided comprehensive costings on any of its proposals.

The parties are working to establish further meeting dates for bargaining.

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180 East Columbia
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website
www.hsabc.org

Telephone 604-517-0994
1-800-663-2017