

BULLETIN

Fighting back with strength of reason

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Issues related to shortages of health science professionals come up time and time again in my dealings with employers and members. However, the government, the Health Employers Association of BC, and some health authorities continue to do everything possible to make working in a BC health care facility an unattractive alternative.

Globally, we have Bill 29 with its ridiculous rules regarding bumping, which force senior employees onto the streets while more junior employees retain employment; there's HEABC with their bogus argument regarding red-circling that can result in an employee being forced to take an immediate 25 per cent pay cut with no buffering.

Individual employers, following the Liberal governments lead, are showing a complete disregard for the collective agreement:

- The Interior Health Authority invents absurd rules regarding on-call and call-back pay that contemplates employees being "scheduled to work" 365 days out of the year to avoid paying proper overtime rates.
- The Fraser Health Authority sends out an edict that all employees will work 7.2-hour shifts regardless of whether there is any benefit to patients or the employer in a flagrant violation of Appendix 7 of our contract.
- The Northern Health Authority threatens hard-to-find lab and x-ray technologists in remote areas and tells them they have to work harder and "up the benchmark."

The list goes on and on. You all have your own experiences at your own workplace. It's no wonder that at the inaugural meeting of the Canadian Health Professionals Secretariat held in Ottawa November 14-17 that Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba all reported their severe shortages have been abated by the mass migration of health professionals out of BC. It may be flat and cold in the prairies but, it would seem, at least you are treated with respect.

Despite all the doom and gloom and the attacks the union and our members have suffered this year, there are some reasons for optimism as the year winds down. We have had some big successes in front of the Labour Relations Board and arbitrators.

The Section 35 decision that declared the new health authorities the successor employers brought added options to members facing displacement and layoff. A negotiated agreement with HEABC allowed for members laid off prior to that decision to be brought back to redo their lay-offs with the expanded options. The LRB has recently agreed with HSA that regional posting provisions were not abolished by Bill 29 and we are currently negotiating with HEABC how this can be applied. An arbitrator has just ruled that employees called back during a strike are entitled to proper call back pay.

So while it may not be obvious or dramatic or affect you immediately, the union is fighting back and winning on the labour relations front. There are a number of important hearings scheduled for the beginning of next year or early spring. I fully expect to be able to report good news to members as these tribunals continue to shoot down the employers arguments.

In the meantime, it is important that HSA members remain strong, united, and stand up and be counted for their collective agreement rights and those of their co-workers.

We are all in this fight together. 

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