

## Canadian Health Professionals Secretariat tackles issues

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**he recently-created** Canadian Health Professionals Secretariat (CHPS) held a highly successful two-day meeting in Ottawa at the end of February to plot strategy for tackling the many challenges health professionals across the country are expected to face this year.

During the meeting the Secretariat welcomed three new independent unions as members: the Association of Allied Health Professionals Newfoundland and Labrador (AAHP), the Health Sciences Association of Saskatchewan (HSAS) and the Manitoba Association of Health Care Professionals (MAHCP).

Hosted by the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE), the meeting took on special significance in view of a wide range of key issues that unions will confront on behalf of members throughout the year, including wages, job security, workload, labour shortages, and effective infectious disease control systems.

#### Labour and politics

James Clancy, national president of NUPGE, presented an overview of the public sector labour relations and political environment across Canada and beyond. He emphasized the relationship between declining worker rights, expanding corporate rights and a growing "democratic deficit" in Canada and around the world. "Increasingly, unions must take these broad domestic and global trends into account when they bargain local contracts," he said.

Clancy also congratulated the group on its success and extended an invitation to all participants to attend the convention of the National Union in June 2004. "Were pleased with the success of CHPS and we are indebted to everyone involved for the strong leadership displayed in bringing the group together," he said. "Cooperation, respect and a broad perspective have been hallmarks of CHPS meetings from the beginning. We look forward to continuing the work the Secretariat has begun. It will definitely create a stronger and more dynamic movement of health professionals in Canada," he added.

#### HSA president to co-chair

The secretariat co-chairs praised all who took part in the meeting.

"This was a valuable opportunity to discuss common issues related to bargaining and public policy, to report on major activities, to build strength from each others experience and to promote common action," said HSA President Cindy Stewart, a Secretariat co-chair.

"All of the participants demonstrated a clear resolve to continue to work together and build momentum in pursuit of a progressively greater vision for health professionals in Canada," Stewart added.

Carol Meyer, co-chair of the Secretariat, and Managing Director of NUPGE, said it is essential that health professionals and their unions continue efforts to adopt a focused national approach to cope with modern health care realities and challenges.

-It is essential that we join hands to establish and achieve common goals. The fact that health professionals and their unions are joining forces through the Secretariat is a positive and promising development for these workers specifically and the health care system in general," Meyer said.

Created by NUPGE

The secretariat was created by NUPGE to address challenges and opportunities facing health professionals across the country and enhance the recognition of the valuable contribution that professionals who provide diagnostic, clinical and rehab services make to the health of Canadians.

Health professionals share a broad community of interest. Their ranks are made up of more than 100 specialized disciplines, including radiological and laboratory technologists, radiation therapists, pharmacists, occupational and physiotherapists, dietitians, speech language pathologists, respiratory therapists, prosthetists and orthotists, psychologists, and social workers, among many others.

These professionals work in acute-care and long-term care hospitals, as well as in mental health, home support, public health agencies and community-based settings.

The Secretariat brings together a potential community of more than 70,000 health professionals.

The unions involved in the CHPS use their individual and shared strengths to raise the profile of health professionals, to advocate on public policy and human resource issues, and to enhance gains in collective bargaining.

Key issues

As well as reporting on major activities and exploring issues related to collective bargaining and public policy, other key items discussed at the two-day meeting included:

- the ongoing effort to raise the profile of health professionals and the CHPS in the larger health policy community in Canada by forging relationships with professional associations, licensing bodies and government agencies;
- a new communications leaflet to promote the CHPS;
- the benefits of advancing the CHPS agenda through increased political activism;
- the publication of a survey circulated by the CHPS on market supplement payments;
- a new human resources planning project undertaken by the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT), which includes the participation of a CHPS representative;
- the large and growing caseloads facing social workers; and,
- the increasing trend toward public-private partnerships in health care and the potential impact on health professionals.

Participants also had the opportunity to meet with senior officials from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSD). A detailed discussion on federal health human resources priorities took place. One of the main concerns expressed by CHPS representatives was the need for a nationally-coordinated labour market plan to address the serious shortage of health professionals in Canada.

Human resource planning

-Too often, health professional human resource planning is intermittent and limited to isolated provincial and territorial initiatives, with an emphasis on short-term fixes," Co-Chair Stewart told the senior government officials. -This approach will not ensure the appropriate supply, mix and distribution of health care professionals that Canada needs now and in the future."

CHPS participants also pointed out to the officials that inter-provincial mobility has created an obvious national labour market for most health professions and that this is precisely why the federal government must play a leadership role.

Both the CHPS and the federal government officials expressed a desire to work toward a long-term strategy to maintain an adequate, highly-skilled and effective health professional work force. 

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