

## National strategy needed to address shortages

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**When the First Ministers** were meeting in Ottawa to discuss the future of health care, I was there in my capacity as co-chair of the Canadian Health professionals Secretariat (CHPS) calling for a national strategy to address the growing shortage of health science professionals in Canada. Ironically, it was the same time that we learned of the Fraser Health Authority's plan to contract out 2,000 MRI procedures.

The Health Authority rationalized their decision by stating that patients are waiting in excess of 200 days to have an MRI. Without question, this is a waiting time that is unacceptable. However the one-time contracting out of MRI procedures is a short term solution to a problem that HSA and CHPS have been raising with provincial and federal governments for some time.

The solution to reducing wait times begins with ensuring an adequate and stable supply of health professionals. Yes, it takes equipment, but it also takes people. Addressing the shortage of health professionals is critical if patients are to have access to important and necessary diagnostic and clinical procedures.

Health science professionals are intimately involved in every step of health care delivery including diagnosis, treatment and recovery. However, in many, if not all provinces, a serious shortage of health professionals ... including lab technologists, pharmacists, respiratory therapists and physiotherapists ... is leaving patients without access to critical services and jeopardizing quality care.

For example, over the past four years, British Columbia has required 298 respiratory therapists to meet demand. However, only 135 were trained and 39 of the graduates left the province. In Saskatchewan, applicants to the lab technologist program have been told they may have to wait 10 years to be admitted even though the province faces a serious shortage of lab technologists.

Isolated provincial initiatives, such as the Fraser Health initiative, do not provide solutions for the long term. A long-term, comprehensive, and national strategy is key to ensuring Canadians have access to the health professionals and services they need, now and in the future.

Reports identify many factors that contribute to the shortage of health science professionals, including limited access to training, declining morale, deteriorating working conditions, constant restructuring, funding cuts, stagnant wages, and an aging workforce.

A national strategy must include, among other things, dialogue with educators, commitment to recruitment and retention initiatives, increased training spaces, and higher quality of working life. Without a broader strategy, the supply of professionals that deliver the range of services necessary for quality and comprehensive care, will continue to decline and the problem of wait times will continue to intensify and multiply.

CHPS was formed two years ago by our national union, NUPGE, to give a voice to more than 60,000 health science professionals who deliver essential diagnostic, clinical, and rehabilitation services to Canadians. Increasingly, through the work of CHPS, and individual member unions across the country, the profile of the work of health science professionals continues to increase.

While national and provincial organizations can play a part, every member has the capacity to contribute. In this issue, read the story about [physiotherapist Susan Hearsey](#) and how she has educated and influenced decision makers about the importance of her work. You can also read about how [lab tech Gottfrid Janz](#) is working to make all of our workplaces safer.

It takes the perseverance and repetition of many voices, at many levels, to make a difference. Please add your voice. 

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