

BULLETIN

Members look to the future with confidence

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HSA's 30th annual convention held April 6 and 7 celebrated the contributions members continue to make every day to the health of their communities. Almost 300 delegates from around the province were on hand for debates around resolutions on diverse issues.

Delegates also strengthened networks to tackle the work to be done to secure collective agreements at two major bargaining tables.

HSA President Cindy Stewart and BC Federation of Labour President Jim Sinclair kicked off the convention by leading the delegates in a march through the streets of downtown Vancouver to the provincial cabinet offices at Canada Place.

Delegates carrying signs and banners gathered as a group of talented HSA musicians sang in support of HSA bargaining demands. Stewart and Sinclair spoke about the important role HSA members play in maintaining the health of British Columbians and how the gains to be made in this round of negotiations would go far in addressing the recruitment and retention problems faced by the health system.

"We have an essential part to play in your health care system. Without our professionalism, our expertise, our commitment and our experience, our health care system would be in crisis," Stewart said.

Proud of our work

Back at the convention centre, she encouraged delegates to take pride in the work they do in more than 100 professional disciplines in health and community services.

"Without the social worker to discharge an elderly patient and work with her family to ensure a smooth follow-up to a hospital stay, where is that grandmother's health? Without the lab technologist to interpret the results to determine the best health options for a critically ill young father, where is that father's health?" Stewart said. "And without the therapist who works with a young special needs child, where is that family's health? We know that every transition house worker, every early childhood education worker, and every AIDS support worker is essential to the health of our communities."

Stewart predicted HSA's health professionals were facing tough months of bargaining for a contract that includes a competitive wage increase. "You, our membership, told us that you want a substantial wage increase," she said.

"We need your full support to go out and back our demand for a 30 per cent wage increase over two years."

"Collective agreement often reflect the degree to which workers are prepared to fight for what they want," she said. "We learned that in the last round of bargaining, and I know that HSA members are determined more than ever to achieve a collective agreement that they can be proud of."

Looking ahead to the provincial election that was still six weeks away, Stewart urged members to work

together to face future challenges. "We're heading into a time of change," she said. "And while we can't predict the future, we can shape it. Every one of us in this room can play a role."

Stewart returned as president

Delegates at this year's convention returned Cindy Stewart by acclamation to her fifth two-year term as president. Presidential elections are held in odd-numbered years.

"I am proud to have been serving the members in this capacity since 1993," she said. "I hope to continue working with the members to strengthen the union, and work with you in improving the health care services provided in this province."

Review of chapter structure and delegate entitlement

Of the many reports presented at convention, one of the most eagerly awaited this year was that of the Chapter Structure Review Committee. This committee was created at last year's convention to review the union's current chapter structure and convention delegate entitlement, based on the principles of fairness, equity and cost effectiveness.

Delegates at this year's convention endorsed the report submitted by the committee after a year of gathering information from all areas of the union. Committee members compiled information from a steward questionnaire, attended each of the fall regional meetings to gather further input, and met with HSA staff for their views. The committee's recommendations include the following:

- maintain current chapter structure and steward formula
- for multi-site or "cluster" chapters, apply criteria for grouping facilities / sites based on community of interest, similar facility / site size, geography, and member preference
- review current "cluster" chapters for above criteria, and seek input from members involved
- develop mechanisms for stewards to service multi-site and "cluster" chapters, including consideration for communication, expense, time and distance
- revise union disclosure policy to enhance communication between stewards. This would permit the union, with authorization, to release steward contact information to other stewards on request
- educate members on the preferred process of contacting local stewards first rather than going directly to the HSA office
- set a cap on the number of delegates entitled to attend convention
- elect convention delegates at regional meetings
- base regional delegate entitlement on the region's size as a percentage of the total HSA membership, applied to the convention cap.

The committee and the Board of Directors recognize that implementing these recommendations will be a challenge. The committee's recommendations in this area include:

- careful analysis of all aspects of implementing a different convention delegate entitlement formula, including the delegate election process
- recommending a formula to the fall 2001 regional meetings
- submitting a resolution to the 2002 convention recommending a change to the delegate entitlement formula.

"In retrospect, it seems fitting that this review took place during our 30th anniversary year. We'd like to thank all stewards who contributed to our report by responding to our questionnaire," committee chair Kelly Finlayson said.

She added that the high response rate showed the committee the importance of these issues to stewards.

"The committee worked very hard on the complex task of reviewing our chapter structure and convention delegate entitlement on behalf of all HSA members," she said.

Resolutions from around the province

Throughout convention, delegates debated resolutions submitted by chapters around the province. Of the 76 resolutions, a few were particularly contentious.

In an emergency resolution, members voted to condemn the management of St. Paul's Hospital for its decision to displace highly skilled health science professionals in the cardiac catheter lab, and to lobby the provincial government to maximize health dollars by ensuring the optimal utilization of the expertise and skills provided by health science professionals. Members gave a spontaneous standing ovation to members from St. Paul's Hospital's cath lab, who spoke to delegates about their frustration at not being able to continue to use their skills in jobs that they love.

In other resolutions, delegates decided that HSA should continue to hold conventions annually, develop a dedicated resource manual for contract interpretation to be distributed to stewards, and explore the option of offering the popular Stress in the Workplace workshops on a regional basis.

Delegates also voted for HSA to continue to lobby the government and employers about the detrimental impact of Program Management schemes on health services and workers in health. In addition, HSA will ask the government and Workers' Compensation Board to recognize vicarious traumatization and post-traumatic stress disorder as workplace hazards for crisis workers – including counsellors, social workers, transition house workers, and therapists.

Members voted to explore the option of moving elections for Members at Large to the fall regional meetings. In a related resolution, the Board of Directors was directed to review the timing of steward elections, and examine the possibility of moving these elections to the fall so that they would no longer be disrupted by the winter holiday season.

Speakers spread solidarity message

Delegates welcomed a variety of speakers at this year's convention, all of whom spoke about the challenges faced by health professionals and the importance of working in solidarity with other groups in the labour movement.

Keynote speaker Elizabeth Ballerman, President of HSA Alberta, told members about the fears health workers face in Alberta after the passing of Bill 11 – which could see the privatization of many aspects of health care delivery. David Rice from the Canadian Labour Congress and James Clancy from the National Union of Public and General Employees brought greetings and encouragement for HSA members from their respective organizations. And Jim Sinclair, President of the BC Federation of Labour, promised that the labour movement would fight every step of the way alongside HSA members as they work towards a competitive wage increase and a new collective agreement.

Members left the convention re-energized in anticipation of the work ahead. "When we leave here this weekend, we will know what we have to do," Cindy Stewart said. "And I am counting on each and every one of us in this room to step up and share in the responsibility of holding the future in our hands."

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