

BULLETIN

Legislative solution damages health care

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After bargaining for several months, which included mediated talks, negotiations for a new collective agreement for the Paramedical Professional Bargaining Association broke down on May 9.

Right from the start of negotiations, the HEABC has made it clear that the employer's and the government's priority is nurses.

During the election campaign, then-Premier Ujjal Dosanjh ordered the HEABC to put an offer to the nurses that met the standard set by the Alberta nurses. The employer returned to the table with a 22 per cent wage offer – an offer that was resoundingly rejected by nurses – including the 700 registered psychiatric nurses represented by the HSA.

Clearly, the Nurses' Bargaining Association and HSA could not recommend that members agree to a contract offer that keeps concessions affecting part-time and casual call-in provisions of the contract on the table.

And while the offer to the nurses falls short of a solution to the crisis in health care, the employer and government haven't even made an attempt to start serious negotiations with health science professionals.

Meanwhile, HSA President Cindy Stewart and I were called to a meeting with the two new health ministers, Minister of Health Services Colin Hansen and Minister of Health Planning Sindi Hawkins, for a discussion about the contributions that HSA and our members can make to improving the health care system in British Columbia.

A laudable goal – but, as we told the ministers, they can't on one hand tell health science professionals they're valuable and necessary to the system, and on the other hand tell them through bargaining that they are not valued as much as other professionals working in the system.

We warned the ministers that refusing to give a mandate to HEABC to bring more money to the table would result in chaos in the health care system that would take years to recover from.

While Minister Hansen appears to understand the consequences, that didn't stop him and 76 other government MLAs from introducing back-to-work legislation that ended job action by health care professionals and took away our legal strike vote.

The day after the government introduced the legislation, Minister Hansen had this to say on CBC radio:

"I'm very concerned about the morale in our health care system. It's something that we have seen deteriorate steadily over the last ten years and certainly this latest coercion to get them back to work is not going to help that."

He's absolutely right. But a collective agreement that values the work of health science professionals will work to mitigate the damage the legislation has already done to the most critical ingredient to excellent health care — the people who deliver it.

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