

BULLETIN

## Wage improvements key to health science professionals' bargaining

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by MIRIAM SOBRINO

Bargaining for a new collective agreement for 14,000 health science professionals is off to a slow start, with the Health Employers Association of BC clearly reluctant to make any real moves to facilitate negotiations.

In the last week of March, the unions tabled a wage demand, calling for a 30 per cent increase in wages for health science professionals.

Rick Lampshire, HSA's Executive Director of Labour Relations, says negotiations have been frustrating, and said the concrete wage demand should result in some meaningful discussion at the table.

-We know what it takes to keep skilled professionals here in BC and that's superior wages and benefits. We want to talk about wages and benefits," he said.

-The employer came to the table with a number of concession demands and no solutions to the crisis of shortages in many health science professions," he said.

-They seem fixated on dealing with shortages in the health care system by getting our members to pay for it through reduced vacations, inferior maternity leave provisions and increased management rights. Every concession demand seems to point to the health care worker as the source of the crisis in our health care system."

Lampshire said the looming provincial election and the prospect of a new government will not dictate the work at the bargaining table.

-When you look at the concessions the employer is proposing, it's clear there isn't enough money at the table right now to achieve a fair settlement for health science professionals. We need substantial improvements for our members ... and an election deadline isn't going to change that," he said.

But, he added, it's important that HSA members continue to lobby politicians to ensure they know the shortages in the health science professions must be addressed in order to protect and improve the health care system. HSA will be working in the lead-up and during the election campaign to ensure all prospective MLAs understand the need to support health science professionals in the health care team.

#### Employer tables concessions

The concession proposals tabled by the employer include:

- reduced vacation time
- increased probationary periods
- concessions affecting maternity leave provisions
- mandatory pay-back of employer-imposed education if a member chooses to leave a job within one year of the training
- reduced ability for shop stewards to represent members in labour relations matters
- increased power for the employer to arbitrarily set work schedules and reassign staff
- increased use of on-call staff for non-emergency services
- reductions on sick leave caps

-The solution to the shortages in the health science professions is not to make existing staff work more hours, as the employer suggests, but to attract new people to the health science professions and to keep existing highly skilled staff ... not to drive them out," Lampshire said.

The unions in the Paramedical Bargaining Association continue to advocate for a settlement that acknowledges health science professionals as critical members of an effective health care team. It is critical that shortages in those professions are addressed, or they will result in inferior care, say bargaining committee members.

The union focus at the table is on significant improvements in wages and benefits to continue to attract and retain health science professionals to work in BC.

HSA members of the Paramedical Professional Bargaining Committee are: Brian Isberg, Chair and Region 2 Director; Catherine Frost, medical technologist, Canadian Blood Services; Reid Johnson, Region 5 Director; Bob Phillips, social worker, Gorge Road Hospital; Faith Uchida, pharmacist, Vancouver General Hospital, and Ron Ohmart, HSA senior labour relations officer. Rick Lampshire, HSA Executive Director of Labour Relations, is the associations chief negotiator. Cindy Stewart, President, is an ex officio member of the bargaining committee.

The Paramedical Professional Bargaining Association represents 14,000 health science professionals in the Health Sciences Association, BC Government and Service Employees Union, Canadian Union of Public Employees, Professional Employees Association, and other unions.

In other bargaining affecting HSA members, the Nurses Bargaining Association was scheduled to announce the results of a strike vote on April 4. The bargaining association is calling for a 60 per cent wage increase.

In the Facilities and Community Health Support Workers sectors, members delivered a 90 per cent strike mandate prior to the expiration of the collective agreements on March 31. Talks at that table continue.

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