



BULLETIN

Members can be proud of 30 years of union history

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by MAUREEN WHELAN

The more things change, the more they remain the same. Thirty years ago, health science professionals felt they were losing out in respect of the wages they were paid.

Their reference points were the relative wages paid to other health care workers, and the rising cost of living that had outstripped their wage increases. It was 1971, and health science professionals took the plunge creating HSA as the first union in BC dedicated to advancing the economic welfare of paramedical professional employees.

It's 2001 and the majority of you reading this were not in the workforce 30 years ago. But I'll bet you can relate to my description of how paramedicals in 1971 felt about their wages and working conditions. After a decade of wage controls, downsizing and restructuring, HSA members know they are underpaid relative to other health care workers, and know that their wage increases have not kept up with the cost of living. Additionally, there are serious shortages in many professions which are exacerbating already difficult working conditions.

Against this backdrop, three important sets of bargaining are taking place the Paramedical Professionals, the Psychiatric Nurses and the Community Health Services and Support workers. At each table the stakes are high. BC nurses are determined to achieve a substantive wage increase. The bulk of HSA members in the paramedical agreement will not tolerate being left behind. We will fight to obtain the wage increase which reflects our education, expertise and skill and one which fairly places us in the wage continuum relative to the support and nursing staff. The Community Support workers want to close the large wage gap between themselves and their counterparts in the facilities.

The past 30 years has been punctuated three or four times with significant collective bargaining battles like the one we face today. These are very important sets of negotiations that will set the stage for the millennium.

The issues are the same as in 1971. But unlike 71 when paramedical employees were naïve and inexperienced in collective bargaining, today you know that our collective voice must be heard, loud and clear. You know we will achieve only what we are willing to fight for.

At Convention we will celebrate our 30th anniversary. We will reflect on our past and plan for the future. It will be a wonderful opportunity for our leaders and activists to come together to commit to the goal of achieving the best collective agreements for our members. What they will look like will depend to a large degree on you, the members, and your commitment to stand behind your bargaining teams. Our history tells us you will be there!

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180 East Columbia
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website
www.hsabc.org

Telephone 604-517-0994
1-800-663-2017