

Members identify wages as top bargaining priority for 2001

January 1, 2001

The Report: January / February 2001 vol.22 num.1

In mid-November, when delegates to HSAs paramedical professional bargaining conference sat down to their first day, they faced two immense tasks. The first was examining and evaluating over 600 proposals submitted by members from around the province. The second was narrowing the list of proposals, and setting strategic priorities for bargaining in order to give the bargaining committee a clear mandate for this round of negotiations.

BARGAINING PRIORITIES

Delegates to HSA's Paramedical Professional Bargaining Proposals Conference identified bargaining priorities for the upcoming round of negotiations. These include:

- Substantial wage increase
- Increased rates for on-call, and sufficient off-duty hours
- Improvements to education leave
- Improved mileage provisions
- Improve special leave to include provisions for "domestic emergencies"
- Protect work schedules that provide meaningful time off
- Changes to the Long Term Disability plan
- Improve parental leave to meet Employment Insurance, Employment Security Agreement, and Labour Code standards
- Decrease workload and ensure adequate relief in case of absences

President Cindy Stewart says that in the end, the message was clear: "After nearly a decade of wage controls, our members want a wage increase that recognizes their education level, skills and experience," she said. "Many BC communities are facing a severe shortage of health science professionals, and unless the government develops a comprehensive recruitment and retention strategy, the problem will only get worse."

Stewart said in addition to wages, HSA members identified increased compensation for on-call and improved educational opportunities as their top bargaining priorities.

She said the \$2 an hour for on-call that health science professionals currently earn is not enough. "Particularly in smaller communities where professionals provide hundreds of hours of on-call per month, the situation has become untenable."

Stewart also noted that although most health science professionals are required to update their education on a regular basis, most are unable to get time off work to take the required courses. In addition, HSA members often take courses at their own expense.

"The health care system cannot function unless health science professionals are available to assist in the diagnosis, treatment and recovery of patients," Stewart said. "Our members want a contract that will help ensure health science professionals are there when patients need them. They are prepared to take whatever action is necessary to protect their professional integrity and the safety of patients."

Stewart commended delegates for their commitment to representing all of HSAs paramedical professional members. "On behalf of the members you represent, thank you for taking on this very important role," she said. "You play the pivotal role of reviewing members proposals and outlining the package that our bargaining committee can take forward to the employer."

Stewart told delegates that this wouldnt be easy. "It is your job to determine which proposals will deliver the broadest benefit to paramedical professionals - which proposals will help strengthen the role of paramedical professionals, and keep our health care system strong for future generations," she said.

"Negotiations are the central function that unions do on behalf of the membership, and it is only through membership participation that the union is able to advance the issues that best reflect the desires and needs of HSA members," she said.

In addition, Stewart described the complex backdrop to the next round of bargaining. "To start, we have no idea which political party we will be facing when talks begin in the spring," she said. "We, along with 250,000 public sector workers, are heading to the table. At this point, the current NDP government has not agreed to negotiate public sector contracts before calling an election," she added. "In fact, they have been rather silent on the issue."

In face of this uncertainty, Stewart called on delegates to be as clear-sighted as possible about HSA members priorities. "As we develop our bargaining strategy, we must be prepared for any and all possibilities," she said. "This also means that we must be more focused than ever - and be very clear about what we want. Starting now, we need to identify our top priorities for bargaining, and we must never waver."

Rick Lampshire, HSAs Executive Director of Labour Relations, addressed delegates in his role as chief negotiator. "Negotiations are about knowing where we want to go - what we need in the end to achieve an agreement our members can be proud of," he said. "All of us in this room are an integral part of the negotiation process. This conference will establish the foundation upon which HSA will build at the bargaining table."

Lampshire noted that HSA members stand to make significant improvements. "Canadians are concerned about the viability of their health care system, and we are seeing the emergence of a private, for-profit system," he said. "And across the country, there are severe shortages of paramedical professionals, nurses, and physicians.

"Here in BC, the reality is that health professionals have been left behind. For the past ten years, the NDP government has made low-wage redress their primary goal at the negotiating table. This is an important objective. Unfortunately, it was achieved at the expense of the health care professionals," he said.

"We now find ourselves lagging behind other provinces in wages, when at one time we were the undisputed leaders. That is why this round of bargaining must be the professional redress round of negotiations."

The current contract for health science professionals expires March 31, 2001.

Type:

[The Report](#)

- [Print](#)
- [PDF](#)