

BULLETIN

Acting on members priorities

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by REID JOHNSON



In my first few months on the job as your president, my priority has been to hear from HSA members about your concerns and aspirations for your union, your workplaces, and your professions.

Since April, I have participated in almost 20 chapter meetings, which have included meeting members from Royal Jubilee Hospital and CML Healthcare in Victoria, to members at the Central Okanagan Child Development Centre, and the BC Cancer Centre in Kelowna to members from throughout the Kootenays.

I've heard from members that you have two key priorities for HSA: you want to see your union working to increase your profile as health and social service professionals in BC, and you want HSA actively participating in advocating for support for your services ... whether that's working to improve and enhance our public health care system, or to advocate for improved funding and enhanced services in the social services sector.

While there is some cynicism about the government's year-long Conversation on Health process, I've heard from you that HSA must continue to monitor the process, and to continue to keep members informed about the government's agenda on privatization and the work we are doing with the BC Health Coalitions Friends of Medicare campaign to promote positive, public solutions to enhance and improve Canada's Medicare system.

On labour relations issues, HSA members continue to look to their stewards and labour relations officers to assist them, and, I am pleased to say, members tell me they are satisfied with the service and support they are receiving. Many members have questions Reid Johnson, HSA president about how the recent Supreme Court of Canada decision on Bill 29, the provincial legislation that eroded negotiated collective agreement rights, might affect them. HSA is involved in preliminary discussion with Associate Deputy Minister of Labour Paul Straszak who has been assigned to work with the affected unions to gather information and develop a strategy for the government to respond to the decision. The Court gave the government a year to develop a plan to address the consequences of the decision. Watch for more information about the Supreme Court of Canada decision and the consultation process in upcoming issues of The Report.

In your workplaces, the message I've heard is that you're tired. Shortages in the health science professions are taking their toll. Many departments have had vacancies for so long, that employers have given up on filling them. That means the people left are forced to do more with less. What is frustrating is that this is not a surprise. The shortages were experiencing weren't unforeseen. They are a direct result of a lack of a cohesive human resources strategy over the past 20 years.

As I said in my campaign for president, a key to building a strong position for bargaining will be to raise the

profile of HSA and the work that HSA members do. I am committed to working to do just that, through building relationships with decision-makers and keeping them informed of the issues that affect our members, advertising campaigns that feature our members, and increased advocacy on health and social service policy.

Members are already looking forward to 2010 and the next round of collective bargaining. The priority in the health sector, particularly in the Health Science Professional bargaining unit, is that the bargaining team continue to work to address the wage split imposed by government in 2001.

I have been working to address the issues you've shared with me on many fronts, including as a panelist in a community forum on health sponsored by NDP MLA and Health critic Adrian Dix, BC Health Coalition events, provincial and national meetings and the media. I believe that every opportunity to talk about HSA and the issues our members face is an opportunity to be taken.

One opportunity I am looking forward to this fall is just around the corner, with the unions annual regional meetings starting September 21 in New Westminster. This will be a great time to connect with the stewards who are the heart of our union throughout the province. I look forward to those meetings and to hearing from experienced and new activists about the issues that are important to you. 

Reid Johnson is HSA's president.

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