

BULLETIN

Alleviating staff shortages

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by REID JOHNSON



t the end of October, I wrapped up my first series of annual Regional Meetings. The Regional Meetings are an opportunity for me, and for board members, to meet for a full day with stewards from workplaces in all ten HSA regions around the province, and to learn about the issues that are most important to members.

The meetings are also an opportunity for members to learn about the work your union has been doing, and to hear about HSA's plans to continue working on your behalf in the coming year.

What I heard consistently across the province this fall is that shortages, and a byproduct of shortages ... workload ... are affecting many HSA members. In workplace after workplace, the issues are the same ... whether its members working in health care or community social services.

Employers are feeling the crunch of shortages in HSA professions. I heard around the province about the extent to which employers are willing to go to entice health professionals to their communities. In the meantime, the downstream effects of those shortages are hitting our members, who are picking up the slack. This often means skipped breaks, unpaid overtime, and work taken home. Another result of the workload is anxiety and concern that there isn't enough time in a shift to go that extra mile for a patient or a client. This is not a tenable position to be in long term for health science professionals who chose this work because you care about people.

You've made it clear that you are concerned about wait lists and shortages, and HSA has been working to address your concerns.

The past couple of months have been very successful for HSA's constituency liaisons, who have held a number of meetings with their MLAs to educate them about the need to address the shortages now and into the future.

In October, I was fortunate to make a presentation to a group of Liberal government MLAs to explain the current conditions and to call for their support for increased training of health science professions. I will be meeting with a committee of the Opposition NDP MLAs in the coming month to send the same message.

But we need your help.

While HSA has heard your concerns about workload, we also need documented evidence so we can put your case to your employers.

HSA has developed a "workload investigation tool" designed to pinpoint the issues in your particular

workplace. If you are concerned about workload, you are encouraged to talk to your HSA steward and complete this tool so that we can begin to build the evidence we need in meetings with employers and at the bargaining table. This is very important!

In addition to hearing your concerns about your workplaces, at each of the regional meetings participants engaged in animated and educational discussion about a very live debate in BC today: the privatization of health care.


With the provincial government getting set to deliver a report following the yearlong Conversation on Health, we can be sure to see the public vs. private debate heat up in the coming months.

Premier Gordon Campbell has made it clear since the 2006 Throne Speech that he promotes a "mixed health care delivery model, with an emphasis on increased participation in our health care system by private providers.

But in community after community, meeting after meeting of the Conversation on Health ... many of which HSA members have participated in ... British Columbians have been saying, yes, they are frustrated with the shortcomings of their health care system, but, no, they don't believe heavier private involvement is the answer.

In fact, many people agree that increased private health care will only make our problems worse.

There is no question the public system is under strain, but there are many changes we can make within the public system to ensure patients get the care they need, where and when they need it.

HSA has an important role to play in the debate about the future of health care. As your president, I will continue to advocate for a strong public health care system and I hope that you will join me. 

Reid Johnson is President of the Health Sciences Association of BC.

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