

BULLETIN

Regional seniority

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by MIRIAM SOBRINO



his question about regional seniority arose from discussions at a regional meeting held this fall on Vancouver Island.



I understand that it was mandated by the union over ten years ago to pursue a provincial wide seniority list, allowing members to travel to any hospital in the province. What concerns me is the ability to jump into a different city, ahead of local workers.

Seniority lists within a geographical area make sense to me, as long as it is possible to commute between workplaces. However, authority wide jumping could cause the displacement of families.

My familys home is Nanaimo. I took a risk coming here. I quit a full time job in Vancouver to take a casual position here in Nanaimo.

As a casual, I am not guaranteed shifts. It is irrelevant that I have always managed to get enough work, by accepting a crazy schedule of days and nights. Like many HSA members, I pay my mortgage one paycheck at a time.

You told me you feel such a displacement is unlikely, but you do admit it is possible. What are we gaining for that risk?

I understand the gain for those with seniority. But how will it benefit the rest?

There is no need for our members to jump in on a position that might have had a casual working five hard years to create: not even the jumper would want that.

Why cant an employees benefits and seniority still transfer to a hospital after the local staff have had a chance at the position? Once working in the facility, they would then be able to use their seniority to apply for new openings, just like any other local worker.

I was casual for three years. I recently got a temporary part time, and in six months will likely be casual again. If things go well, there will be a full time position within the next three years. But not if I get bumped.

In an era of shortages, you say there will be lots of work. Things change.

I humbly ask you to respond to me by putting this before our members in our news magazine, The Report.

To the members, I request you respond by email, telephone, snail mail, or just shout. Log onto the website and let HSA know how you feel on this issue. Because once it changes, we can never go back.

*Chris Semrick
Respiratory Therapist
Nanaimo*



The issue of regional and provincial seniority is one that HSA members have considered at the bargaining table and at conventions for several years.

In 1996, the union held a special convention on the issue. Province-wide seniority was debated at length and in depth, as a wholesale change in the organization of health care delivery changed the shape of health regions, as well as the structure of health care bargaining. Subsequent conventions have seen delegates uphold the principle of regional and provincial seniority, identifying it as an important job security provision.

Collective agreements are developed and evolved in the best interests of the workers whose rights and benefits are governed by that collective agreement. Principles to pursue in collective bargaining are debated and voted on by representatives of the membership to ensure the bargaining principles reflect the interests and desires of the membership. Currently, the Health Science Professionals collective agreement recognizes institution-based seniority, except in the case of vacancy postings or by mutual agreement between the employer and union ... which is what is being negotiated within VIHA.

The application of seniority in a fair manner is a challenge for all unions. In some instances unions have to be prepared to abrogate seniority rights for some members. For example unions are obligated by the provisions of the Human Rights Code to weigh the interests of disabled workers versus senior able bodied workers in a fair and transparent process. Otherwise the union can be liable for damages under the Human Rights Code for the failure to accommodate disabled workers.

In this instance, we are negotiating a broader geographical seniority list. This will provide more economic security for those workers covered by the broader seniority list. For example a reorganization with job loss will allow regular employees to take vacancies rather than bumping junior regular employees.

This change may mean you are on the casual list for a longer period of time than you otherwise would have been. However, you would not have lost your job, while the senior regular employee may be facing a real job loss. In periods of downsizing or layoffs, protecting job security for the most members of the union by a fair and transparent system is the unions primary responsibility. 

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