

BULLETIN

Charting our course together

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by REID JOHNSON



year ago, delegates to HSAs convention gave me a mandate to lead your union into the future.

On the eve of the unions 37th convention, Ive taken this opportunity to look back at the past year and consider what I, and your board of directors, have done collectively to honour that mandate.

Over the course of the year, I have had countless occasions to represent HSA in a wide range of circumstances. Ive had numerous encounters with HSA members in their worksites, at meetings and various events. Ive met with health authority CEOs, government ministers, opposition MLAs, other labour leaders and members, bureaucrats, educators and students. No matter where I go or who I talk to, I know that HSA members are respected for your high standards of professionalism ... whether its at your day job, as a union activist, or a community advocate.

What Ive heard from members is that your priority is for your union to represent your concerns, and that your union is an effective advocate on your behalf.

On that front, weve had many significant successes. We negotiated a settlement in the wake of the Bill 29 court decision. Weve moved forward on grievances and workers compensation claims, weve made headway on occupational health and safety issues at many worksites, and weve negotiated for improved working conditions in new certifications outside the four main public sector collective agreements.

Weve also looking to the future needs of members, adding specialized staff to address labour relations and classifications matters, a dedicated pensions and benefits advocate, and a costing analyst to prepare us for an important round of collective bargaining in 2010.

On the broad topic of shortages ... an issue that affects each and every HSA member in some way ... the topic is on the agenda for every meeting and every event that I attend. Weve had success in getting the medias interest on this story. Weve also delivered the message to the decision-makers in government.

While our focus has been on shortages in the health science professions, our members in the community social services are feeling the crunch too. And we are working to raise awareness on that front.

We were fortunate to have Suzanne Bennett, HSAs first board member and vice president from the community social services sector, among HSAs delegation to a national meeting sponsored by our national union, NUPGE, to share experiences and ideas for improving the conditions in the sector across the country.

Just last month the Social Planning and Research Council of British Columbia released a report on the challenges of recruitment and retention in the community social services. Low wages, unstable funding and lack of recognition of the importance of the work our members do in the sector were all identified as barriers to recruitment and retention. As members of the Community Social Services Bargaining Association, we are working with other unions to advance these issues as we look forward to bargaining in 2010.

But, just because the message is out there, it doesn't mean government and employers are prepared to do anything about it yet. We still have a lot of work to do.

And that's what this year's convention ... the lead-up to a critical round of bargaining in 2010 is all about: Charting our Course for the future.

I look forward to seeing many of you at convention this year, and many more of you throughout the coming year as I continue to meet with members in your communities to hear from you what HSA should be doing for members today and as we chart the course together into the future. 

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

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