

BULLETIN

## When the going gets tough...

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**LIKE THE PATIENTS AND CLIENTS** we serve all across British Columbia, HSA members are facing some big challenges this fall. Travelling to meet with members at this year's round of regional meetings, I've had a chance to hear about these first hand.

It's clear to all that after years of wasteful spending during good economic times, and in spite of pre-election promises to protect our health care system, the provincial government is already making big cuts to the health services families and communities depend on.

People who are sick and in need of timely treatment are going to wait longer for diagnostic services like MRI, x-ray, ultrasound, nuclear medicine and laboratory results. That means they're going to get sicker, exacting a terrible cost on their children, their parents, their loved ones. Human suffering aside, the cost to the health care system in the long run will be greater, belying claims of fiscal responsibility.

And thanks to increased MSP premiums and the sweeping new HST, imposed with no public consultation, families are paying more, while getting less.

HSA is keeping a close eye on cuts across BC this fall, and will be speaking out to make sure the public is made aware of the impact.

**WERE ALSO PREPARING TO NEGOTIATE** a new contract with this government, and the conditions are difficult. While the provincial government insisted until quite recently the economy was healthy, even going so far as to try to get some positive coverage by offering a generous and pre-emptive contract to nurses, they are now adamant that wage increases and overdue improvements to workload and benefits are completely off the table.

It's a tough climate for bargaining, but we're fortunate to have a tough negotiator. I'm very pleased that Maureen Headley will be drawing on years of experience in the labour movement and in government as she leads our bargaining committee through the negotiations to come.

The first steps have already begun. Throughout the fall, members have been using regional meetings to voice their concerns, discuss proposals for bargaining, and elect delegates to November's Bargaining Proposal Conference.

Members I've spoken with have talked about a number of issues ... wages, benefits, job security and workload ... and HSA staff will be presenting papers on each to the delegates attending the Conference November 8-10.

**MEMBERS ARE CONCERNED** about the new swine flu strain. What will it mean for their jobs, their patients and clients, their own families? HSA has been working hard to get reliable information for our members, and for the public.

I'd like to recognize the efforts of one particular member of our team: Sheila Vataiki, one of our senior Labour

Relations Officers, has become instrumental in the effort not just to protect HSA members in the workplace, but to protect the public as well. Her work to settle important questions about the transmission of H1N1 has led to significant improvements to plans for protecting workers ... like you ... exposed to infected individuals in British Columbia and across the country. You can read more about this achievement, and learn more about the H1N1 virus and how it will affect you and your workplace in this issue of *The Report*. 

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

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