

BULLETIN

Protecting health care is key priority

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Delegates to the 2009 HSA Health Science Professionals Bargaining Proposal Conference, held in Vancouver November 8-10, have specifically identified "protecting quality health care" as one of the top priorities for bargaining.

"That sends a very powerful message," said HSABC President Reid Johnson. "Our members want us to secure a good contract, but they're also deeply committed to making sure the public gets the health care services they need.

"And they feel it's up to us to speak up about the cuts because the government isn't telling the truth."

Johnson added that the cuts will cost more in the long term.

"The provincial government says they need to reduce costs," said Johnson. "But their cuts and wage freezes are going to cost more money in the long run. It just doesn't make sense. They need to sit down with us. Together we can identify practical and reasonable ways to control costs without making short-term cuts that ruin lives, drive health care workers away, and leave the health care system facing greater financial pressure in the future."

Larry Brown, Secretary-Treasurer of NUPGE, also pointed out the contradiction between provincial cuts and federal stimulus to rebuild the economy.

"Cuts to public services at the provincial level, like what Mr. Campbell is doing here in BC, are the wrong response to this economic climate, said Brown. "Public sector spending is what stopped the economic collapse. So how can you have Stephen Harper saying it's important to keep stimulus spending going on the one hand, and provincial governments freezing wages and cutting jobs on the other. Don't they cancel each other out?"

HSA Executive Director and chief negotiator Maureen Headley addressed the challenges of bargaining with a government that has shown it can't be trusted.

"The government said 'we will consult with you and we will involve you in the process,'" said Headley. "Consultation hasn't happened. We have to take that into account when preparing to deal with them. Will these guys be true to their word? I think the answer is no."

Headley added that delegates were in favour of talking directly to the public about the cuts and how they threaten BC's health care system.

"We're going to start being a little more vocal. British Columbians need to know their government is making

serious health care cuts when they promised not to do so."

HSA launched a province-wide radio ad campaign on November 23. The ads ran for two weeks, and more advertising is being planned for 2010.

About 60 delegates, elected at regional meetings around the province, attended the conference, along with HSA Board members and staff. Delegates also elected a bargaining committee to take their priorities forward as bargaining begins. 

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