



BULLETIN

A time for tough choices

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WHEN I BECAME PRESIDENT OF HSA IN APRIL OF 2007 I made a commitment to leadership that relies on hearing, understanding, communicating, and acting on the priorities of the community that is our membership.

I still stand by those words. Over the last few months, whether at ratification vote meetings around the province, in the virtual town hall meetings in January, on the phone or by e-mail, Ive spent a lot of time listening to members talk about the new contract for health science professionals. There is no question that members are frustrated with the governments -net-zero" mandate.

I share this frustration. I dont like the mandate and I dont agree with it. Its unfair and unreasonable to give wage increases to nurses and doctors then turn around and refuse equal treatment for health professionals.

Some members have told me we should have tried to force the government to abandon the -net-zero" mandate. But after two years of bargaining, as every other union failed to break the mandate imposed after the 2009 election, it was clear we couldnt either.

Some members say we should be more like the nurses union. I dont disagree. But the nurses clout is rooted in their high profile in media and popular culture. Thats why the government was eager to settle with them before the 2009 election. Health science professionals will never be as recognized as nurses and doctors, but I am committed to long-term efforts to raise your profile so well have more clout at the bargaining table. Thats why were investing in a new look, new language to describe ourselves and advertising campaigns that tell our story to as many people as possible.

Some members tell me they see no good in this contract at all. I point out it protects wages and jobs in a changing health care system, which is critical when you consider the 500 nurses laid off in the last year, consolidations in the lower mainland and potential privatization of lab services. In addition, it provides significant enhancements to extended health care benefits and a professional development fund. Theres much more information about these improvements and the bargaining process starting on page six of this issue of The Report.

These improvements were not easy to get. The employer wanted to reduce its benefits costs by making our members pay 30% of premiums. We surveyed the members and it was clear you wanted to the employer to keep paying 100% of benefit costs. Our bargaining committee did better than that and achieved a benefits package equal to the nurses.

The board of directors and the bargaining committee recognize this is not a perfect deal. But it is a strategic one, and it allows us to uphold our responsibility to act on the priorities of our membership under difficult circumstances.

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