

BULLETIN

## Union backs off hospital job action

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### South Delta Leader

The union representing health science professionals in B.C. has called off job action that cancelled or postponed some medical procedures at Delta Hospital last week, but workers remain without a contract with the province.

The Health Sciences Association of B.C. (HSABC) triggered a job action across the province last Thursday and Friday, despite the fact both sides have agreed to mediation.

The union's president said Monday (Dec. 10) that mediation is a voluntary agreement by both sides, but it doesn't prevent job action.

"We were making progress, and the government tabled a proposal that was clearly geared to provoking us, to escalate our job action to give the government an excuse to legislate and impose a contract," said Reid Johnson, president of the HSABC.

The government is reportedly seeking a 1.4 per cent increase over two years with possible wage rollbacks, while the union is looking for a two-year agreement with wage increases of four per cent and no clawbacks on benefits. The union's contract expired in March and their members have not had a raise since April 2009.

The union represents roughly 17,000 health sciences workers, including diagnostic, clinical, and rehab therapists and technicians.

Veteran labour mediator Vince Ready spoke to both sides this week, convincing the union to back off its job action.

Health Minister Margaret MacDiarmid issued a press release Sunday (Dec. 9) expressing relief.

"I've worked side-by-side with these health care professionals and have a huge respect for them and their work, but there is an appropriate process in place to deal with these issues and that is at the bargaining table," she said.

MacDiarmid deemed the offer made to the union "fair" and within the government's Cooperative Gains Mandate enacted for public sector union contracts which expire after Dec. 31, 2011.

But Johnson said although their workers have the second highest average of post secondary education in health care next to doctors, they aren't compensated commensurately.

"We know in this contract we're not going to make up the difference between us and Ontario, Alberta, or Nova Scotia. We just want the same as what the other public sector unions have already settled for."

Johnson said almost 40 branches of health science professionals in B.C. are behind the rest of the country in terms of compensation. He said there's also the lure of the private sector in Canada and the U.S., which

creates the danger of brain drain.

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