



Job action isn't hitting local labs; New offer enough to stall walk-out, but not enough to end bargaining

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Laboratory services are running normally this week, Interior Health says.

Unionized health-care workers have decided not to withdraw their services to back contract demands.

Members of the Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association had threatened to walk off the job, leaving only emergency service levels in place at IH labs.

But health science professionals called off upcoming rotating strikes after getting a new contract proposal from the government over the weekend. However, the union said it's still not taking the deal.

Workers including those who conduct X-rays, CT scans, MRIs, ultrasound, nuclear medicine and other imaging procedures had walked off the job last week, and planned to reduce further hospital lab services as of midnight Sunday. The Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association said Sunday it was changing tack after the province tabled a wage increase and concessions just before midnight Saturday.

President **Reid Johnson** described the new proposal as "so far off the mark." He said the government is trying to provoke members into escalating job action, in order to gain an excuse to recall the legislature and impose a collective agreement.

"We are not going to go down that road," he said in a release. "Our dispute is not with the people who need those services. It is with a government that refuses to negotiate a fair and reasonable agreement for essential members of the modern health-care team."

The union and employer held three round-the-clock days of talks, mediated by veteran Vince Ready, leading up to the proposal. It adds up to a general wage increase of 1.4 per cent over two years, with some workers facing wage rollbacks, Johnson said.

B.C. Health Minister Margaret MacDiarmid said Sunday she's relieved the planned job action has been suspended. She called the proposed wage increase "fair" and said the agreement is similar to other deals recently signed with other provincial health-care workers.

"We've been clear we have to make sure health-care costs are sustainable to ensure access to quality and timely care for British Columbians now and in the future," she said in a release.

"That's why we're working with the very people who deliver health care to find fair and balanced settlements -- they know best where costs can be controlled."

Rotating strikes last week lead to the cancellation of about 3,000 medical procedures, including diagnostic imaging and surgeries, while another 1,500 patients lost access to other services, according to the government.

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