

BULLETIN

An agreement worth supporting

December 2, 2013

A MESSAGE FROM HSA PRESIDENT VAL AVERY

THE REPORT, DECEMBER 2013

HSA and other unions have been hunkered down in ceaseless and difficult negotiations for almost five years.

The effort has expended enormous resources - resources that we need to focus on helping members deal with their daily workplace challenges.

So when mediators approached HSA and other unions about early negotiations for a five-year deal, we decided to listen.

We brought our chief stewards together from around the province to discuss the opportunity. They gave the bargaining committee a mandate to proceed with negotiation and to focus on talks around wages, protection for benefits, fixes to the Pharmacare Tie-In drug benefits, more resources for the Enhanced Disability Management Program, solutions for recruitment and retention, and a five-year term for any resulting agreement. And they agreed to brief members and continue canvassing your opinion.

The talks yielded a tentative agreement, and as this goes to press, members are voting.

I think this agreement is worth supporting. Here's why.

Since 2001, the government has been forcing harsh mandates and imposing contracts.

In 2001, the government imposed a contract with a two-tier wage system. Your union didn't accept that. We even conducted an illegal strike to fight it. But in the end, the government imposed it through legislation.

In 2012, the government imposed the 37.5 hour work week and the Pharmacare Tie-In. All health care unions had to bargain for protections and accept the change, or face another legislated contract that would have made things much worse.

Make no mistake. Governments are pushing to cut your wages and benefits. But we've found creative ways to push back and make important gains like shift differentials and addressing issues around on call and call back. Since 2001, the minimum total wage increase for health science professionals has totaled 24.65% - while the cost of living in BC has gone up 20.57%. And that is the minimum. Some of our members have seen wage increases totaling 48.85%.

We continue to work to find ways to undo the worst parts of these punishing mandates. This contract is no different.

Your bargaining committee has reached an agreement that protects your benefits while offering a small wage increase. If the nurses or the public service unions achieve a better increase, this agreement guarantees we get that increase too. Add to that additional support for the new Enhanced Disability Management Program, a

special committee on recruitment and retention, and a significant improvement to the imposed Pharmacare Tie-In allowing members to claim 50% of the costs for drugs that weren't covered at all in the last agreement. It is always up to the members. But we think this is an agreement worth supporting.

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