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Tentative agreement reached for health science professionals

A tentative agreement has been reached between the Health Science Professionals Bargaining Association and Health Employers' Association of BC.

Health science professionals are members of the modern health care team who deliver clinical, diagnostic and rehabilitation services in hospitals and communities throughout the province.

Reid Johnson, HSA president, said the agreement meets objectives set by HSA's bargaining proposal conference in November 2009, despite bargaining in a tough economic climate.

"From the outset, we recognized this was going to be a difficult set of negotiations. Our members are critical members of the modern health care team, and government imposed a strict 'net zero' bargaining mandate. Government refused to commit any money to address necessary priorities to protect quality health care."

"After more than nine months of negotiating, the bargaining committee was able to work within the confines of that mandate to earn improvements in the collective agreement that will serve to improve and enhance the public health care system and those working in it into the future," Johnson said.

Highlights of the tentative agreement include:

- Enhanced benefits coverage
- Improved opportunities for professional development
- A fair and equitable process to protect job security
- Working groups that lay the foundation for progress on challenges related to disability management, on-call and call-backs.
- Substantive classifications review, with two significant priorities being to lift Grade I to Grade II wage rates, and to recognize the value of professional practice leadership.
- Establishment of a high-level joint committee including the Ministry of Health, Health Authorities and HSA that recognizes the value of and involves health science professionals in decision making about the health care system.

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“In order to achieve these significant long-term improvements, the bargaining association agreed to delay an extra day of vacation accrual by one year. In addition, some cost-saving measures related to the role of chief paramedicals and members working without general supervision have been agreed to,” Meyers said.

“While these measures achieve cost savings, we have protected the integrity of the work of health science professionals and the need for professional leadership from within their specialized areas of work. This was critical for laying a foundation for modernizing our classification system,” she said.

Work to develop a modernized classification system that more accurately reflects the structure of the work of health science professionals in an evolving health care system will be a priority for both parties between now and the next round of bargaining, which will begin in less than two years. The proposed agreement expires in March 2012.

Johnson said the agreement is a good one for health science professionals.

“Despite the political and legislative climate, and bargaining during an economic recession, our bargaining team was able to be creative and thoughtful. What they have negotiated through a tough slog of nine and a half months at the table, including intensive talks for the past six weeks, is an agreement that looks forward and anticipates a changing health care system,” he said.

“Your bargaining committee stuck to the mandate delivered to members, who instructed the committee to pursue priorities that allow health science professionals to deliver quality health care, including a focus on modernizing the classification system, addressing challenges in recruitment and retention, enhancing quality of life issues at work, maximizing the value of the benefit package, and protecting job security in an ever-changing and evolving system,” he said.

HSA’s Board of Directors voted last night to recommend the package to members to vote in favour of ratifying the collective agreement.

A full information package will be distributed to members and posted on the HSA website to members in January 2011. In addition, HSA will hold information meetings for members in January. Worksite based ratification meetings to allow members to vote on the agreement will be scheduled for late January and early February.

The tentative agreement covers more than 17,000 health science professionals who deliver health care services in BC hospitals and communities.

The majority of health science professionals are represented by the Health Sciences Association of BC. Other unions in the Association are the BC Government and Service Employees Union, Professional Employees Association, Canadian Union of Public Employees and Hospital Employees’ Union.

HSA’s representatives on the bargaining committee are Jeanne Meyers, Chief Negotiator; Maureen Headley, HSA Executive Director of Labour Relations and Legal Services; Val Avery (HSA Vice President and Region 2 Director) - Bargaining Committee Chair, Physiotherapist at Victoria General Hospital; Joan Magee (Region 8 Director), Medical Laboratory Technologist, Cariboo Memorial Hospital; Aaron Wilson, Community Coordinator, Centre for Ability; Darwin Wren, Social Worker, Tumbler Ridge Health Centre; and alternate committee members Kimball Finigan (Region 5 Director), Radiation Therapist, Vancouver Cancer Centre; John Christopherson, Counsellor, Vancouver Cancer Centre, and Cheryl Greenhalgh, Medical Radiation Technologist, Royal Columbian Hospital.

For your information, due to the holiday season, the HSA office will be closed from December 24 to January 3, reopening at 8 a.m. Tuesday, January 4.

