Now you see it…now you don't

(or how a 3% "increase" can be less than 0 using BC Government math)

Let's say you've just graduated with your Medical Laboratory Technologist diploma after 3 years of hard work and now it's time to go to get a job and pay-off those student loans.

Under the current HSPBA agreement over the next 6 years you would earn $332,172 gross. Sounds like a lot when you put it that way doesn't it? Well you earned it with your knowledge, hard work and dedication.

Of course, **if you were to just move to Calgary and work there instead over the same period of time you would earn $432,322**. Yup it's not a mistake. You would earn $100,150 more over the 6 years. That is **30% more**. Maybe you could cheer for the Calgary Flames…it's a pretty nice incentive to do so.

But wait! In recognition of your knowledge, hard work and dedication, the BC government has decided that you get a 3% increase and the entry level will now be Grade II, not Grade I. What a deal, eh?

Well there is a catch, or rather a plethora of catches. First of all, in order to get that 3% they will take away the equivalent of 1.6% of wages in benefit reductions. They don't really care what you give back. We could even decide ourselves. You could reduce your sick leave entitlement, be reimbursed less money for your medications or nothing at all if it's not listed under Pharmacare, pay a portion of the extended health and/or dental plan premiums yourselves… whatever… just as long as you give them back 1.2% of total compensation (total compensation is wages + benefits and 1.2% of that is roughly equivalent to 1.6% of wages.) But let's leave that aside for a moment. Let's instead focus on the 3% increase and this move to Grade II as the working level.

But before I do that let's mention another "gotcha." You see they want to take the wage scale that currently increases from the lowest to top wage over 6 years and spread it out over 10. Yup, this is their proposal. The same money except now it takes nine years to reach the same top rate you currently reach in five. And that "lift" from Grade I to Grade II? What they propose to do is to move you down to whatever increment gives you just the same 3.0% wage increase you already got. Grade I techs will gain nothing much additional.

This is what the end result would **be if you work 6 years under their new scheme. You earnings over that 6 year period would now be $337,992**. Yes, $5,820 more over a 6 year span… well, at least it's something, right? Well think again. Let's bring back that benefit grab into the picture. Your net loss of benefits is $5,516 over the same period. So… 5,820 – 5,516 = $304… over 6 years**… just over $50 extra per year**… as the old saying goes "don't spend it all in one place."

But here is the kicker. For anyone starting at the first year rate, the scenario above is the best possible outcome because it is only Grade I that is getting rolled into Grade II. For example:

Let's say you work in a Grade III special procedures job during same time frame and you're currently at the bottom increment. **Under the current agreement you would earn $357,840**. Under the same super-duper "take this 3%...please" scheme those math wizzes in Victoria are offering you, **the earnings over the same time frame would be $350,876.** That's right. Your earnings over the same six year period would be **$6,964 less than you would earn with the agreement you have now**. I won't even bother deducting the loss of benefits here…you get the picture.

Current monthly wage rates (Lab, Imaging, etc.):

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
Grade I	$4,111	$4,318	$4,510	$4,714	$4,903	$5,125
Grade II	$4,264	$4,480	$4,683	$4,894	$5,090	$5,321

New monthly rates with +3% and 10 increments (Lab, Imaging, etc.):

	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10
Grade II	$4,392	$4,513	$4,634	$4,755	$4,876	$4,997	$5,118	$5,239	$5,360	$5,481

To be fair, the news is slightly better for those near or at the top rate already. If you are currently at Grade I, Year 6, the +3% placement in the new Grade II grid will put you at the Year 9 rate. But they have also created a new "gotcha" just for you. This is what their proposal says about you:

> *Current Grade I employees will not be eligible for placement at the top step of the new wage grid during the term of the Collective Agreement. Further, such employees will not be eligible to move to the top step unless negotiated in subsequent rounds of bargaining.*

That's right. For you, the 10th increment is not accessible.

Under the current agreement your gross earnings over the 6 year period would be $369,000. **Six years of increment 9 in the new Grade II scale is $385,920**. So you actually would be $16,920 ahead in gross wages. Subtract the cost of the benefit loss totaling $6,298 for you and you get a net gain of $10,622. Expressed as a percentage increase to your current wages, this would be a net gain of 2.9%. You actually would see close to the touted 3% raise.

Note: I have used the rates that apply to the technologies merely as an example. Everything above applies equally to all HSPBA disciplines. As you can see, the "General Wage Increase" of 3% is not very "general" nor is it even an "increase" in some cases.

The Ministry of Health says they know who you are and that they value you. But I guess they don't realize that the average Health Sciences Professional is pretty good at doing simple math.