



memorandum

TO: HSA Pharmacists, Chief Stewards
FROM: Jeanne Meyers, HSA Executive Director, Legal Services and Labour Relations
DATE: January 19, 2012
SUBJECT: **Report from Jan. 18, 2012 Telephone Town Hall Meeting**

For those who were able to join us on the telephone town hall meeting last night, thank you very much for your participation. This was an important opportunity to hear from the union about our efforts around fighting back against HEABC's plan to roll back pharmacists' wages by up to 14 per cent.

Just shy of 500 members called into the meeting, and we enjoyed a very high rate of participation. Unfortunately, due to some technical hiccups, some members were dropped from the meeting, in many cases, we were able to reconnect members to a 'listen-only' line.

At the end of the meeting, members had an opportunity to leave messages. Those messages will all be answered, and members are encouraged to follow up with questions, comments, and suggestions by sending an email to HSA through contract@hsabc.org

If you were unable to join us, this memorandum provides a brief report from the meeting. Participating in the discussion were HSA President Reid Johnson, HSA's Executive Director of Legal Services and Labour Relations Jeanne Meyers, HSA Membership Services Coordinator Dave Martin, and Pharmacists Kathleen Collin, BC Women's and Children's, Faith Uchida, Vancouver Hospital, and Jing Yi Ng, Burnaby Hospital

BACKGROUND

In 2001, the government imposed an agreement on Health Science Professionals. For the first time, the agreement saw differential wage increases for members, based on the government's call on which professions needed market adjustments to meet market demand. Some professions, pharmacists included, got a higher wage increase than other professions.

In 2005, HEABC and HSA had discussions about wage premiums for pharmacists to address problems with recruitment. A Memorandum of Agreement was negotiated that allowed for the introduction of market adjustments outside the regular collective agreement to address competitive labour market pressures. In the case of pharmacists, the pressure was there, and in 2006 we negotiated wage premiums ranging from 9 to 14 per cent. These premiums were negotiated outside the regular collective agreement, and were not costed against the agreement. That was possible because the health authorities said they could and would find the money to pay.

Those premiums have been in place since 2006, and while the shortages are not as universally acute as they were in 2006, you all know that staffing is a challenge every day. In smaller communities, you regularly count on hiring retail pharmacists to cover part time and casual shifts.

In larger facilities, the challenge is the same. There are simply not enough people to do the work. HEABC's argument that the shortages are no longer an issue is absolutely absurd. There's no disaster right at the moment,

only because the employer is offering wages and benefits that a hospital pharmacy position competitive. Take \$12,000 out of someone's pocket, and we're talking about a completely different reality.

Earlier this month, on January 6, HEABC served notice that it intends to eliminate the market adjustments effective April 1, 2012 in all health authorities, except for Northern Health Authority, which opted out of the wage rollback.

POLICY GRIEVANCE

Monday, HSA filed a policy grievance on the matter. In the policy grievance, the union is calling on the Health Employers' Association of B.C. (HEABC) to cease and desist. The union believes HEABC's action contravenes the collective agreement.

Under the terms of the collective agreement, the parties have 14 days to resolve the grievance. A meeting with HEABC has now been scheduled for January 26. If there is no resolution, then the issue will proceed to arbitration.

WHAT CAN PHARMACISTS DO TO OPPOSE THE ROLLBACK?

Dave Martin, Membership Services Coordinator, reported out from a meeting held with representative HSA pharmacists. That meeting was held January 13, and was an opportunity for pharmacists to discuss strategies for opposing the rollback.

At that meeting, pharmacists expressed deep concerns about the impact the wage rollback will have on hospital pharmacy services and patient care. In every instance pharmacists reported the only reason staffing isn't at the crisis level it was prior to the 2006 market adjustment is because hospitals can now offer competitive salaries. Pharmacists reported that the elimination of a competitive salary will land hospitals right back into a severe crisis.

Members shared several examples of how important pharmacists are on the modern health care team, and the critical role they play in reducing costs in the health care system.

- Up to 25 per cent of emergency room visits result from medication 'mishaps.' Clinical pharmacists can reduce hospital visits and stays by ensuring the proper medication and combinations of medications are prescribed as a patient's therapy.
- Pharmacists ensure effective and safe treatment of patients: medication counseling, drug therapy monitoring, and diagnosing and resolving drug-related adverse effects are all part of the job. Hospital pharmacists also work to mitigate critical drug shortages and recalls. With the hospitals short-staffed, medication safety becomes a serious issue.
- 17% of hospital pharmacists -- 155 of 905 in BC -- are currently eligible for retirement

Arising from that discussion, HSA and the representative group of pharmacists undertook to follow up with a number of actions.

PHARMACISTSMATTER.CA: SPREAD THE WORD

HSA launched a website for members and allies -- including other members of the health care team, patients, and families -- to document and email their concerns to Premier Christy Clark, Health Minister Mike de Jong, Leader of the Official Opposition Adrian Dix and NDP Health Critic Mike Farnworth as well as MLAs, Health Authority representatives, and HEABC. Within 48 hours, 450 letters have been sent.

The Health Minister's initial comment to the media was that "In the view of the ministry, the adjustment is no longer required to address the recruiting issue." The most important job we have to do is to educate the minister about the reality of your workplaces.

HSA will continue to meet with decision makers, local health authority representatives, and HEABC to carry forward the message that the wage rollback is ill considered and short sighted. It is critical that pharmacists and their allies continue to do the same.

In addition to the letter-writing campaign being coordinated through the website, pharmacists are asked to write to your perceived allies -- your excluded pharmacists managers/directors and to tell them that you require and expect them to take this issue to the highest levels within you organization to have it undone, or to have your Health Authority opt out, as North Health Authority has done.

You want to hold those managers accountable. You want them to tell you that they are doing this. Put pressure on them to put pressure on the Health Authority. We believe that for the most part, they are doing this as they have expressed surprise and disappointment in this directive from HEABC. But they need your support to feel confident in going to the wall for their staff, and for their patients.

OVERTIME – DON'T DO IT FOR FREE

Stop working free overtime. This includes not skipping your meal breaks.

How much less could we ask of ourselves than to receive our entitlement for the work we do. In our discussion with pharmacists at last week's meeting, they told us you are not prepared to stop working overtime at this time.

We are therefore saying that you must put actual fiscal pressure on the employer by insisting you are paid for the overtime you work. It is no secret that outrageous amounts of overtime are being worked every day, day after day, without compensation. Management, you, and we all know that the system depends and is subsidized by the unpaid overtime you put in. You are entitled to be paid for the overtime you put in. Being paid for the work you're doing will not negatively affect patient care, and it will send a strong signal to the employer that you are serious about your opposition to the wage rollback – about your anger at the strong message from government and HEABC that your contribution is under-valued.

In addition to ensuring you are credited for all your overtime worked, we encourage you to cash out any authorized overtime you have already accumulated to ensure you are paid out your overtime bank at your current rate of pay.

LOWER MAINLAND PHARMACISTS – DON'T SIGN TRANSFER FORMS

Lower Mainland pharmacists being consolidated and transferred to Fraser Health Authority in early March, and who are not currently employed by Fraser Health Authority, you are asked to **NOT** provide the transfer forms FHA has sent you, with a deadline for return of January 27.

This is a protest action that causes them inconvenience through administrative chaos for Fraser Health and the other affected health authorities.

HSA knows that Fraser Health has already stated that there are consequences for failing to provide the forms. **THIS IS NOT THE CASE**. We have reviewed Bill 29, and we have reviewed the labour law, and are comfortable that employers cannot deem you to have resigned simply because you didn't fill out a piece of paper.

Participants on the telephone town hall meeting had several questions about this direction from the union, and HSA wants to reassure members that failure to submit the forms is not cause for deemed resignation (or termination.)

Members need only to continue to report to work as per normal following January 27. Continue to provide the employer with obvious evidence of your continuing employment relationship by working normally. We believe the worst that can happen as a result of failing to fill out the forms is that the employer might be able to issue discipline, and try to construe the act as insubordination. The union would grieve any and all such actions should the employer take them, and we would back the members 100 per cent.

It is important to have broad participation in this action for it have an impact.

RETIREMENT PACKAGES

As many pharmacists have told us, almost 20 per cent of you are in the retirement 'window.' To make it perfectly clear to your employer that you are considering your options, you should ask for a retirement package – the paperwork necessary for filing your retirement notice.

This is another administrative tactic that will deliver the message, again, that pharmacists are considering their options as a result of an ill-considered plan by HEABC to cut costs.

MEMBER FEEDBACK

During the telephone town hall meeting, a number of members had opportunities to pose questions about the rollback and what they can be doing to express their opposition to the wage loss. The four actions outlined in this memo are all simple, yet direct messages to government and your employers. The more participation we have in these activities, the stronger the message is.

Since the rollback was announced, we have received many helpful and thoughtful emails from members.

We are particularly interested in knowing the state of pharmacy staffing in your workplace. By all accounts, staffing is an issue – even with the wage incentives offered through the market adjustment. And members have made it completely clear that you have a range of options as highly trained and coveted health science professionals. Our health care system can't afford to lose you, and it's our collective job to make sure government understands how this short-sighted move will have an adverse impact on patient care.

In the next short while, HSA will provide more information that you can use to educate your colleagues, peers, managers, patients, physicians and others you work with about the value of pharmacists in the health care system.

Resources are already available on the HSA website at www.hsabc.org/pharmacists, and that information will continue to be added to as we receive data and supporting documents from pharmacists around the province.