



Negotiations

“Stay calm, be brave, and watch for the signs.”

Canmore Local President Sue Lawrence summed up her sense of the April 11th UNA provincial Presidents’ meeting in Edmonton with the closing slogan from the CBC radio comedy show *Dead Dog Café*: “stay calm, be brave and watch for the signs”. The Negotiating Committee gave all the Presidents a full report on the status of negotiations and the ramifications of Bill 27. The Presidents voted not to consider job action and to stay in negotiations to get a provincial agreement that adapts to the new Bill 27 Regional bargaining units.

April 28th and 29th were scheduled as the last two days of mediation at the main table with the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta (PHAA). But mediator Alan Beattie put on pressure for more time, and more dates were tentatively set for May 7th and May 9th.

The Employers had expected the mediator to finish on April 29th. There is much speculation about whether they planned to break talks off completely, or what next steps they might take.

“We might expect another round of heavy PHAA advertising,” says Chief Negotiator David Harrigan. “They may try to generate the appearance of a crisis in the talks, even though we are quite ready to keep on working on the outstanding issues.” Harrigan says the UNA Negotiating Committee is prepared to begin bargaining in earnest and deal with the Bill 27 issues that have thrown a huge hurdle into the process.

“We believe that free collective bargaining can resolve the issues, as it has in the past,” says UNA President Heather Smith. “There is still room to move in the Employers’ position on all the rollbacks, and there is room to move on some of our proposals as well. Negotiations have yet to hit the serious work-it-out stage.”

Province-wide flyers for nurses’ message

Nurses at the provincial Presidents’ meeting went away with thousands of flyers and small posters to distribute all across the province. “Putting more pressure on nurses isn’t the answer for nurses or patients” says the flyer.

“The Health Regions plans for patient care services are unworkable and dangerous,” said UNA President Heather Smith. “We think the citizens should be alerted to what they want to do.”

Heather Smith and CFNU President Kathleen Connors took the flyers to Edmonton’s Strathcona Market the day following the Presidents’ meeting. Reaction from market-goers was positive to the hundreds of flyers that Heather, Kathleen and other UNA members handed out.

“The Health Regions spent somewhere around a million dollars on advertising last month, misleading Albertans about the contract negotiations. We don’t spend our members’ money the way they are ready to spend tax dollars,” Heather Smith says.

In Cardston, Local #160 President Carol Court received a ticket after someone complained about receiving the flyer. UNA provincial office was ready to help any Local or members who might be ticketed for passing out the flyer.

April 28 International Day of Mourning for Dead and Injured Workers

In 2002, 800 people across Canada died on the job or as a result of their work. Another 370,000 were injured. April 28th is the Day of Mourning for employees killed or injured by their job. While it serves as a memorial for all those who have been hurt, it also is a time for advocating for increased safety and safer working conditions.

The Alberta Workers’ Compensation Board has published posters marking the day with some of the latest statistics from 2002. Last year 101 Albertans died as a result of their work. 43 of those died as a result of workplace trauma, 26 from motor vehicle accidents, 29 from occupational diseases and 3 from other causes.

UNA issues SARS Advisory to all Locals and OH&S committees

UNA has issued an Advisory asking that all Locals hold urgent meetings of their Occupational Health and Safety Committees to ensure adequate safety precautions are in place in case of a SARS outbreak in Alberta.

Hundreds of Ontario nurses have been exposed and are in quarantine. Most of the current suspect SARS cases in that province are nurses or other health workers.

Adequate policies and protocols as well as sufficient protective equipment must be ready should an outbreak occur. All Locals should review the completeness and adequacy of:

- Appropriate SARS protocols and procedures ready
- Adequate SARS protective equipment available
- A clear policy on what “triggers” SARS protocols and procedures

The UNA advisory provides information on SARS control and containment from Health Canada and from Ontario Health.

The Ontario Nurses Association has advised its occupational health groups to review SARS protocols, preparations and equipment. The experience of Ontario nurses has been that proactive prevention cannot be left up to health Employers. The ONA says the provincial Directives on protection have not met adequate standards.

Sending nurses to Ontario to battle SARS?

Ontario Health Minister Tony Clements called nurses the “heroes” of the fight to contain the SARS outbreak and asked for help with additional health professionals from other provinces last week. Alberta Premier Ralph Klein was quick to offer support. But exactly how nurses from other provinces can help, and who would send them and how, was still undetermined by the end of the week. Ontario Nurses Association President Barb Wahl pointed out that although there has been a tremendous strain on nurses, many are still only working part-time and were not yet “fully deployed”.

“We are sure there are Alberta nurses who would volunteer to go if they are needed,” says UNA Vice-President Bev Dick. No official request or plan has come forward so far, she said. “Certainly, Alberta nurses may help if it is needed, but we should remember we do not have any surplus in the nursing workforce here. Alberta nurses work thousands of hours of

overtime every week now. If we send nurses out-of-province that will leave crucial nursing work undone here. It would result in longer waits or cancelled surgeries in Alberta.”

There is no extra, reserve capacity in the health system to handle contingencies like this type of outbreak, UNA President Heather Smith says. When the provincial health budget was announced, she pointed out that: “When we see the strains something like SARS can cause, we should realize that our health system needs to be strengthened not continually choked for funding. All Canadians depend on the public system for security and they know the health system needs to be better funded and equipped.”

Calgary Health Region hit with harsh criticism

A Calgary Judge harshly criticized the Calgary Health Region in a Fatality Inquiry report that came out Monday, April 14. Judge Manfred Delong called for a public inquiry into the state of health care in Alberta after reviewing the facts surrounding the death of 23 year-old Vince Motta.

Motta had visited two Calgary Emergency units before having an appendectomy in the High River Hospital. After an asthma attack on the operating table he was transferred back the Rockyview Hospital in Calgary, where he died. Delong said a public inquiry is necessary before “another death becomes the subject of an inquiry in the context of beleaguered emergency services.”

The Judge criticized the Health Region for treating the Inquiry as a public relations exercise. In the report he said the Calgary Health Region” has attempted to portray itself as suffering under a national trend of emergency departments under stress without acknowledging that the trend was arguably started here in Alberta.” The Judge also recommended increasing the number of hospital beds to keep up with growing population.

First agreement for Athabasca Extendicare nurses

The new UNA Local at Athabasca Extendicare has negotiated its first collective agreement. The nurses’ agreement is based on the main Extendicare contract and only runs until July 31 when the main Extendicare agreement expires. Athabasca’s agreement included several letters of understanding on Local conditions including an extended workday and on-call provisions.