

## **UNA is the union for nurses in all 9 regions but nurses may have to vote for a “receiving” agreement**

### **Campaigning begins in Bill 27 run-off votes for 14,000 health workers**

Massive campaigning is breaking out throughout the province as unions head into the major run-off votes created by Bill 27. Nearly 14,000 health workers will be choosing their union in the votes, all by mail-in ballot. UNA representation of Registered nurses is not being contested in any Region but nurses may receive ballots to identify which “receiving” collective agreement they want.

The nurses’ vote is not very significant because the issues of Region-wide agreements are all on the table for resolution in provincial negotiations. So far the Labour Relations Board (LRB) has ruled that only nurses in Region 6 (the former Capital Health) must vote for a “receiving” agreement. UNA is objecting to the ruling, and health Employers may object as well. Finally, whether nurses in Region 6 or in other regions will have to vote depends on the outcome of LRB Hearings June 2-5. UNA is arguing no votes are necessary and none should be conducted as they would be disruptive in provincial negotiations.

UNA members in Region 6 could be treated to a vote between identical contracts – if the LRB insists on following the Bill 27 process. Bill 27 stipulates that a “receiving” collective agreement be selected between the two largest facility agreements in each Region. But the LRB ruled that in all other Regions the facility agreements are the same and no votes on “receiving” agreements are needed. In Edmonton, the LRB said there were enough differences between the University of Alberta Local #301 agreement and the Royal Alex Local #33 agreement to justify a vote. The University has longer hours of work and seniority is calculated in hours, not from date of hire.



UNA has pointed out that each Local signed identical contracts, only small parts of which are the Local conditions.

The LRB Ballots are slated to go out in June to all Registered nurses who are Employees of Region 6.

The “receiving” agreement is NOT the final collective agreement, but the basis for negotiating the new agreement for all Registered nurses in each Health Region.

#### **UNA says the vote in Edmonton is unnecessary**

“We explained to the LRB how disruptive this vote would be in the middle of provincial negotiations. We are looking at all these issues at the table,” says UNA President Heather Smith. “We don’t think this meaningless vote should go ahead.”

Other Health Region Employees in the province are voting to choose which union will represent them. Bill 27 stipulates that for each of the four sectors (nursing, auxiliary nursing, support and paramedical) in each Health Region, only one agreement and one union will apply. The elections will pit the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE), the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) and the Health Sciences Association of Alberta (HSAA) against each other. The campaigning for votes is expected to be fierce.

In all nine provincial Regions, UNA already represents over 80 percent of nurses, so no votes between unions are being held for nurses.

## **Negotiations**

### **Mediation continuing, dates scheduled until mid-June**

The UNA Provincial Negotiating Committee met with mediator Allan Beattie for several days last week to review UNA's bargaining proposals at the main Health Regions' (PHAA) table. More talks are set as Beattie prepares a discussion paper that he will present towards the middle of the month. After PHAA and UNA discuss Beattie's paper and if no agreement is reached, he may prepare mediator's recommendations.

## **Investigation of Foothills mould continues**

Although preliminary results were not even fully completed, the Calgary Health Region put out a regional news item last week saying no toxic mould has been found at the Foothills Hospital. UNA immediately wrote to the Region urging them to correct their statements as the research is on-going. The investigation of the persistent illness problems on a renal dialysis unit is continuing under the special Alberta Workplace Health and Safety committee, which includes Karen Rollins, an expert UNA nominated to the group.

Foothills Local #115 Vice-President Michelle Senkow reports that the Local is encouraged that "the committee is operating under Health Canada guidelines that mandate continued investigation, where health problems persist, until the cause is found." Michelle says that: "swab samples have now been taken from the interior of dialysis machines. Air samples have also been taken, and the samples are being cultured to determine if there is any mould present, and, if so, what kind (genus and species)."

## **BC nurses raise security concerns after double murder in Mission**

Drastic staffing cuts make security even more of an issue in hospitals, the British Columbia Nurses Union (BCNU) said after two women were murdered in a Mission hospital last week.

The husband who shot his wife and mother-in-law on a hospital ward later took his own life.

"The incident in Mission this week should remind the health authority and the provincial government just how dangerous health care work can be," says BCNU president Debra McPherson. "We need to take a very close, careful look at a number of issues right away."

Workplace violence is the second highest cause of injury and illness for BC health workers, the union reports.

The nurses want to discuss whether there is enough security at health care facilities, particularly those like Mission Memorial that have experienced drastic cuts in the last year. The cuts mean there are far fewer staff members on hand during evenings and nights to handle incidents of abuse or violence directed toward patients or staff. The nurses are also raising concerns about proposals to contract out of security to inexperienced companies.

## **CFNU Biennium moved to Toronto**

The Canadian Federation of Nurses' Union decided last week to switch the Biennium convention during the first week in June to Toronto because of a labour dispute at the St. John's airport. "We chose Toronto in another act of solidarity," says CFNU President Kathleen Connors. "Our sisters and brothers are valiantly meeting the SARS crisis there, as they did in BC, making us all proud."

## **Ontario announces 117 new nurse practitioner positions**

Ontario recently announced it is adding 117 new nurse practitioner positions. This is the first block of 369 practitioner positions announced last September. The positions are mainly in primary health care roles in community health centres, family care networks and in home care, long-term care and in aboriginal communities.

Ontario only has a total of 520 nurse practitioners registered.

In Alberta, only about 10 nurses are slated to graduate from the University of Alberta this year with qualifications that would allow them to register as Nurse Practitioners. A similar number is also graduating from the Universities of Calgary and Athabasca. The U of A estimates the number of Practitioner qualified graduates will increase to 15-20 per year by 2006-2007.

With Bill 27 Alberta made it illegal for Nurse Practitioners to belong to a union. Alberta is alone in this, in all other provinces, Practitioners have full bargaining rights.

## **SARS is back in town**

### **Ontario health workers renew battle**

A new outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome is forcing thousands of Ontario health workers back into full protective gear as charges begin to fly that the "all clear" was called too soon. Again, many of the contacted and quarantined people are health workers, again largely nurses.

The latest outbreak involves patients and visitors at several Toronto-area hospitals. Again, the community at large is not affected. Nurses attending the CFNU Biennium next week will not be exposed and the Ontario Nurses Association is ensuring that none of its delegates come from SARS contact workplaces.

The SARS outbreak exposed the inherent dangers of the work of front-line health care providers, and showed substantial weaknesses in the system for infection control, says the Ontario Nurses Association (ONA). Several hundred nurses were put in quarantine during the outbreak, and a number of them fell ill. Many nurses have yet to receive the promised compensation for their quarantined time. According to ONA President Barb Wahl, Ontario got a strong reality check on what can happen when an already understaffed and stressed system is stretched beyond its capacity.

"Our nurses are being given pizza and tickets to Wonderland by their employers for having worked during the SARS crisis, and yet we know nurses from out of province were offered \$100 an hour to work here," said Wahl.