



LRB decisions all waiting for Hallowe'en

The Alberta Labour Relations Board (LRB) says it won't make a ruling until "the end of next week" on UNA's complaint about the Health Regions refusing to return to the table and negotiate in good faith. October 31, Hallowe'en, is also the date the LRB will hold a hearing to answer the question of how many arbitration boards would need to be appointed for UNA's negotiations with the Regions.

The UNA provincial Negotiating Committee met on October 22 to begin its appraisal of the next steps. Members voted at the AGM for the Committee to make an assessment by October 31 and, if necessary, call a Reporting Meeting.

"We hoped the LRB would rule immediately that the Regions were not negotiating in good faith and should come back to the table," says UNA President Heather Smith. "Negotiations are the only way to get an agreement for nurses and it's time to get back to talks," she said.

UNA negotiator David Harrigan would not speculate on whether the LRB would order the Regions back to the table for good faith talks.

On Hallowe'en the LRB will be asked to rule on arbitration questions from Human Resources and Employment Minister Clint Dunford. Dunford asked the LRB whether there are 142 arbitration panels needed, or only 20 bargaining units and panels under Bill 27 and, regardless of the number, whether arbitration can be combined into just one panel. That ruling would pave the way for arbitration to begin.

Nurses at the AGM had also voted overwhelmingly to reject arbitration as an acceptable option for negotiations.

"It's all coming down to Hallowe'en," says Heather Smith, "We should know then whether the Regions have to come back to talks or are going to try and force a contract on nurses.

The provincial Legislative Assembly is scheduled to resume sittings on November 18. Rumours abound that PHAA is lobbying the government to introduce legislation immediately. A special law could be forced through the Legislature in as little as two days.

Nurses taking message to the streets, to MLAs and to Health Region Board members

"Don't force a dangerous contract on nurses"

Nurses have been meeting with MLAs, picketing Ministers offices and waving signs to passing motorists on the street all week. The campaign was decided upon at the AGM to motivate the Health Regions to return to negotiations.

Every District has organized different activities to put the pressure on the Regions. Check with your Local Executive to find out how to get involved.

Nurses in their own words

UNA messages hit the airwaves and newspapers

This week UNA is also running a significant public messaging campaign on radio and in newspapers to let Albertans know why nurses can't accept a dangerous contract. The messages are directly from nurses "in their own words". As Jennifer Evack from Calgary puts it in a newspaper ad: "Moving nurses from hospital to hospital is a bad plan for dealing with inadequate nurses staffing. It is dangerous for patients."

The campaign is running on radio stations and in newspapers province-wide. The messages are all available on the UNA website ww.una.ab.ca.

Foothills nurses headed to court on mould problem

Court dates have been set for January 12 and 13 on nurses' concerns that the Calgary Health Region's plan to deal with a toxic mould problem in the Foothills Hospital could be inadequate and lacks credibility. Calgary is proceeding with a testing and remediation plan for the dialysis unit where nurses and other staff have been experiencing symptoms and illness for years. The plan was approved by Alberta Workplace Health and Safety but does not inspire confidence in the nurses. Local #115 Vice President Michelle Senkow says, "It's still not transparent. We need independent verification of testing that this is working and they are still withholding test results from us." The Local has asked for UNA's expert Karen Rolins to independently verify all stages of the plan. If the Region refuses to allow UNA's expert in, the nurses could be in court on November 6 for an interim hearing.