

Day #105 and counting

CCEBA Employers still holding up agreement

Dates for further negotiations with the Continuing Care Employers Bargaining Association (CCEBA) have been set for October. Talks with CCEBA will be on October 20 and on October 13 negotiations are scheduled with the Bethany Care Society for its Cochrane facility. Bethany continues to insist Cochrane talks must be held separately. Negotiations for these long-term care nurses broke off after a brief attempt at mediation in July. UNA has since applied for arbitration for the fewer than 500 nurses who remain without a contract.

Meanwhile the long-term care nurses have been waiting over 100 days for their part of the provincial bargaining to be settled. A special counter on the UNA website shows the number of days that these nurses have waited since the main provincial contract was ratified on June 9th.

The Presidents of the affected CCEBA long-term care Locals will be meeting next week to discuss the next steps with the provincial Negotiating Committee.

Meanwhile the long-term care nurses and colleagues from other sites have been holding informational pickets to keep up the pressure on the Employers. On September 23, nurses picketed in front of the St. Michael's Health Centre in Lethbridge, in conjunction with the UNA South District meeting. On September 10, nurses picketed in Edmonton and on September 9th in front of Bethany Care Centre in Calgary.

Agreements reached for most new members from other unions

Provincial negotiations reached an agreement for the transition into UNA contracts for the new members who came in as a result of Bill 27. Nurses who had been in the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees (AUPE), in the Communications Energy and Paperworkers (CEP) or in the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) moved to

UNA when Bill 27 created single bargaining units for all of each Health Region's nurses.

The new UNA members had been working under their previous contracts but now, effective the date of the ratification of the new agreements, will be moving under the provincial agreement. Nurses will have their ratification votes on October 6.

However, Chinook Health Region is refusing to reach an agreement for Fort Macleod Special Development Unit and will not go ahead with ratification of the agreement that was reached for the Raymond Care Centre. Retroactivity (wages and other monetary items) is the major outstanding issue. UNA and PHAA will jointly apply to the Labour Relations Board to resolve the Fort Macleod situation. The LRB must use the dispute resolution process outlined by Bill 27 that gives it the authority to mediate and/or arbitrate outstanding issues.

Numerous details – such as hours of work, vacation entitlements and seniority – had to be worked out to bring these nurses into the agreement. The nurses also keep some of the provisions they had in their previous agreements like special parking arrangements.

After the third day of talks between the UNA Negotiating Committee and PHAA (the Provincial Health Authorities of Alberta) the agreements were wrapped up on September 22.

Coming under the provincial UNA agreement for the first time now are the nurses at:

- Claresholm Care Centre (Formerly represented by AUPE)
- Alberta Hospital Ponoka (Formerly represented by AUPE)
- Community Nurses in Northern Lights (Formerly represented by CEP),
- Mental Health Clinics (Formerly represented by AUPE)

UNA's first all-Employee Local at Agapé Hospice in Calgary

Welcome to one of the newest UNA locals, Local #232 at the Salvation Army Agapé Hospice in Calgary. Nearly 40 people are included in UNA's first "all employee" local that includes RNs and all the non-management staff of the

Hospice. They recently elected their first executive: President – Terry Tomlinson, Vice-president – Tricia Rogers, Secretary – Helen Keintz and Treasurer – Heather Gladstone. The Local members also voted to select their first bargaining committee and are preparing to begin negotiations for a first contract.

The LRB held a hearing in Calgary on UNA's application for certification for Agapé Hospice and ruled that as it was neither a nursing home nor a hospital it should be an all-Employee unit. The 39 Employees include cooks, dietary aides, unit clerks, a social worker, even a chaplain, as well as Registered nurses. The Employees voted in favour of joining UNA and now have begun their own Local.

FOIPP information from Employers is free

Some UNA nurses are asking former Employers for proof of employment to have their seniority dates adjusted. Some Employers are balking at providing the information. However, under Alberta's Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy they must supply it. Under the law they can only charge reasonable photocopying fees. Most Employers are quite prepared to supply the records, but if there is a problem, an official FOIPP (Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy) request will require them to do so. Any personnel file on any Employee must be accessible to the Employee with no charge other than for copying.

Most nurses find it is just as easy to use an affidavit on their earlier service record that is sworn before a Commissioner for Oaths.

Premiers health deal gets money but no protection against privatization Is Ralph going to be left alone to innovate with health care?

Having the federal government return to decent funding levels for health care is a positive thing, say nurses, but the complete lack of "strings" attached to the funding, or any protection against privatization is concerning.

"The plan to put \$41 billion of federal funding in over the next ten years pretty much destroys the unsustainability myth," says UNA President Heather Smith. "That's absolutely what Canada needs to maintain a national medicare system with standards and goals. But I'm still concerned that there is no protection against privatization."

Premier Ralph Klein, who missed most of the First Ministers' meeting, appeared to be dismissive of the deal. "I really don't want anything. I want to be left alone so we can get on with reforming our health care system to make it sustainable."

Alberta nurse Pauline Worsfold, Secretary Treasurer of the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU), says

Klein has no more reason to push ahead with privatizing. "He's been using this unsustainability pretext, which was always a big myth, especially given Alberta's huge surpluses. Now with the federal government funding up again, he's got even less reason to erode the public system," she said from Ottawa. Nurses and other public health advocates were a major presence at the First Ministers meeting. The Canadian Health Coalition took advocates to the site in a double decker bus draped with a banner that read "2-tier is for buses."

Health deal sets another deadline for nursing shortage action plan

The deal also sets a deadline of December 31, 2005 for a new action plan to deal with the shortage of nurses and other health workers. This marks the third deadline since 1999 for a national plan to tackle the growing crisis in health professions.

"The action plan has been studied for years," says UNA President Heather Smith. "We need investment in educating and hiring more Registered nurses immediately, not another deadline."

The national Building the Future initiative began back in 1999, when nursing organizations, unions and employers entered into discussions with provincial and territorial governments, Health Canada and Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), to address the human resources crisis facing Canadian nursing. The project is due to come out with a report by the end of the year. (see www.buildingthefuture.ca).

New Brunswick nurses avert strike with increase of 24%

The New Brunswick Nurses Union (NBNU) released details of the ratified settlement they reached just before their strike deadline.

"We were able to negotiate a contract with a salary increase of 24% over the life of the contract with a retroactive increase to January 1, 2004 of 9.5%. This will be followed by a 3% increase in December 2004..."

The contract runs until December 31, 2007 and has further small increases over the period totaling to 24%. By July 1 of 2007 the nurses will hit a top rate of \$31.49 an hour.

Salaries competitive with those of nurses in the Atlantic Region were the nurses' main concern and the agreement "puts us in the range of Atlantic parity."

NBNU says there are no rollbacks or losses in the agreement, which also saw shift premiums increasing to \$3.60 per shift for evenings and \$5.40 per shift for nights. Weekend differential is up to \$1.25/hour.

New Brunswick members voted to ratify the agreement on September 21 and 22.