

Tremendous Unity

98.8% vote sends strongest possible signal

Nurses spoke with one voice in the province-wide vote on September 15th. UNA members made it clear that the mediator's recommendations are not a contract option.

"We can't make the message to the Health Regions any clearer," said UNA President Heather Smith. "This huge consensus of thousands and thousands of Registered nurses has to tell them their contract plan will not work. The Regions have gone down the wrong road and they need to come back to the table to negotiate responsibly."

UNA called the vote to respond to the recommendations for a contract released July 18 by mediator Alan Beattie. The contract covers nurses working for the province's Health Regions, however UNA members with the Alberta Cancer Board, the Continuing Care Employers Bargaining



Negotiations

Association (CCEBA) and other employers who are also currently in negotiations were also voting.

The Health Regions campaigned hard with advertising and direct personal letters to convince nurses the plan was a fair compromise. But the recommendations were essentially the Employers' plan and did not address any of the nurses' issues.

"The Regions spent a lot of money trying to make nurses and Albertans believe this was a fair and safe plan," Heather Smith said.

"Nurses did not buy it. We hope the public doesn't either. The

Health Regions should stop wasting money trying to mislead Albertans and come back to the negotiating table seriously prepared to work out a new contract to actually improve conditions."

Regions refuse to commit to negotiations after UNA presents new proposals September 18

The Health Regions negotiating committee refused to say if it would continue negotiations after talks on September 18. UNA presented proposal revisions that directly address the Regions' issues, Heather Smith said. She said the UNA provincial negotiating committee is ready to stay in bargaining until an acceptable deal can be reached.

"There was a sense among some of the members of our committee that the PHAA has a set agenda and it doesn't matter a tinker's damn how much the UNA attempts to accommodate their issues," Heather Smith told the Edmonton Sun.

On September 7, the Health Regions applied for compulsory arbitration in the provincial talks. Mediator Alan Beattie is preparing a list of unresolved issues to be addressed by arbitration and will be providing it shortly to the Department of Human Resources and Employment who must appoint the arbitration panels.

Legally, the government must appoint separate arbitrators for each of the 142 collective agreements covered in provincial bargaining, UNA pointed out in a letter to the Minister, Clint Dunford.

"This [arbitration] will not lead to an agreement," says UNA President Heather Smith. "There will be no collective agreement without the agreement of nurses, that's what bargaining is about. The Health Regions are attempting to force nurses into a contract that is dangerous for nurses, for our patients and our health system."

Some Employers try to prevent nurses from voting

A number of long-term care Employers tried to block nurses from voting on the Mediator's recommendations.

The Youville Nursing Home (Local 154) and the Capital Care Group (Local 118) sent letters to all staff nurses telling them they were not to vote. They even cancelled the room nurses had booked to hold the votes.

The nurses arranged to vote in their vehicles off the property and had the largest turn out ever and the results were 100% 'NO'! "The moral of the story is—don't tell a nurse they shouldn't be supportive to their fellow nurses!!!"

UNA charges PHAA of manipulation with misleading information

UNA has filed an unfair labour practice complaint with the Alberta Labour Relations Board, and has filed grievances with Employers over the Health Regions' misleading information campaign leading up to the vote.

"The Regions soured negotiations by repeatedly spreading misinformation about what they have proposed in expensive newspaper and radio advertising," Heather Smith said.

UNA asked that the Regions correct inaccuracies and misleading statements it distributed in letters mailed directly to nurses and published in newspaper and radio advertising.

The UNA complaint to the LRB is that the Health Regions have broken the law by all the misleading advertising and by communicating directly with nurses, attempting to pressure them to accept the plan in the mediator's recommendations. "This amounts to interference with the representation of employees by UNA," reads the complaint.

The grievances charge that by writing letters directly to individual the Regions violated the collective agreements by failing to recognize the union as the exclusive bargaining agent for nurses.

The LRB has indicated it will respond to UNA's complaint by September 22. The grievances are proceeding.

Calgary's Jack Davis makes over \$500,000

The Calgary Herald reported this week that "Total compensation for [Jack Davis, CEO] of the Calgary Health Region has jumped 87 per cent in the past four years to more than half a million dollars—more than triple what the premier earns."

The report also said Sheila Weatherill, the CEO of Edmonton's Capital Health Authority, earned \$475,000 last year.

According to other reports it was lawyer Bill Connauton who negotiated Davis' and Weatherill's contracts. Connauton was the Health Regions' initial spokesperson for UNA negotiations, but has since left the Employers' team.

Other Calgary Region executives also have high incomes:

- Executive vice-president and chief operating officer:

\$302,000 to \$370,000 over two years.

- Senior vice-president and chief medical officer: \$240,000 to \$459,000 over three years.
- Vice-president of corporate services and chief financial officer: \$245,000 to \$356,000 over two years.

The Herald also cited the draft annual report for the Region which showed that Peter Valentine, the former auditor general of the province, is paid \$119,000 as a half-time senior adviser to Davis. Two years ago UNA asked Valentine as auditor general to review charges of conflict of interest in the Calgary Health Region. At the time Valentine ruled there was no legal conflict.

Calgary Region Board faces sea of red after vote

The Calgary Health Region Board was seeing red the day after the UNA provincial vote. The Board faced a sea of red, as nurses showed up dressed in the UNA colours at the regular Board meeting September 16.

"We did not go unnoticed," says UNA Secretary Treasurer Karen Craik.

As part of its agenda, the Board heard the report of a Regional survey that asked what issues hamper patient/client care? The top two responses to the survey were inadequate staffing and increased workloads.

Karen Craik pointed out to news media that UNA's top aims in bargaining are dealing with exactly those two issues.

UNA AGM: Provincial meeting October 7, 8 and 9 in Edmonton

The 2003 UNA Annual General Meeting will kick off this year with a Special General meeting to deal with the Bill 27 changes to UNA District structure. The three day AGM will include updates on negotiations, motions and business, special speakers and elections. It's being held at the Northlands Agricom in Edmonton October 7, 8 and 9.

Guest speaker for the AGM will be Alberta researcher Wendy Armstrong who has been closely watching issues and costs in long-term care. After a recent round of research into privatization and standards, Armstrong has been speaking widely about Alberta's massive changes, and more recently about the drastic fee hikes.

Constitutional Amendment motions at the Special meeting will deal with changing the UNA District boundaries, District Representative entitlements and District Representative elections.

"We want to adapt to the new Health Regions and Regional bargaining units with as little disruption as possible," says 1st Vice-President Bev Dick who is on the Legislative Committee. "The structure we are recommending will no doubt be fine-tuned in time, but it gives us an initial plan that should work well with the new Regions."

Bev Dick has again been acclaimed as 1st Vice-President and Jane Sustrik as 2nd Vice-President for the elections at the AGM. The President and Secretary-Treasurer positions go up for election next year at the end of two-year terms. Members will be voting for Executive Board members, although the number and placement of positions may be changed by amendments made at the Special meeting.