

UNA STAT

UNITED NURSES OF ALBERTA NEWS UPDATE FOR MEMBERS



Delegates vote at the Demand Setting Meeting.

Nurses vote on proposals

- UNA is closer to determining its proposals for the provincial round of contract negotiations after the three-day Demand Setting Meeting held in Edmonton last week. Nearly six hundred UNA members debated various proposals from Local members over the three-day meeting. “There was certainly a lot of debate and the concerns of members were brought forward time and again,” said UNA President Heather Smith following the meeting. Cancelled vacations, being called repeatedly in to work, and excessive overtime were some of the many concerns nurses raised at the meeting. “We talked a great deal about how to improve working conditions so we can keep the experienced Registered nurses this province needs,” Heather Smith said. The provincial Negotiating Committee brought forward its recommendations after reviewing the hundreds of proposals from nurses. The delegates debated and amended the recommendations. The final set of negotiations proposals will go to members for a ratification vote that is to be held at all Locals participating in the negotiation round. That vote will be held on January 11, 2007. All Health Region-employed nurses as well as many long-term care nurses, and Alberta Cancer Board nurses are included in the provincial negotiation round.

UNA President optimistic about new PC leader

- Heather Smith is “optimistic” about the election of Ed Stelmach as the new Progressive Conservative leader. “We’ve heard Mr. Stelmach say he supports publicly-funded health care. We hope he will go on to protect our system by also supporting not—for-profit public delivery,” she said after the leadership results were announced. Heather Smith also said she wants to meet Mr. Stelmach to talk about the staffing crisis in Alberta’s hospitals and community health care. “Sufficient staffing is by far the biggest problem facing our health system right now. This should be a major concern for Mr. Stelmach and I want to speak with him about how to retain the experienced nurses we have and recruit more nurses.” She said she wants to meet Mr. Stelmach if possible before provincial negotiations begin in January.

BC nurses fighting for-profit, private Emergency room

- BC nurses are concerned a plan to establish a private for-profit “emergency room” in the centre of Vancouver will make problems at the city’s existing hospital emergency wards even worse. The for-profit scheme by the False Creek Surgical Centre threatens to draw nurses and doctors away from already understaffed hospital emergency wards, while patients who are found to need hospitalization will be forced onto the doorsteps of hospital emergency wards anyway. “This plan is causing our members real concerns,” says Debra McPherson president of the BC Nurses’ Union. “Quite apart from any violations of the Canada Health Act, to open and advertise a private for-profit emer-

gency room poses real problems to the quality of care patients may expect to receive.”

Meanwhile the BC Health Care Coalition also condemned the private ER. “It’s unconscionable to let the ability to pay dictate who’s entitled to receive health care services and who is not. This is not what British Columbians believe in and it’s not what they want.”

At the last minute before the clinic was slated to open, the B.C. government announced it would prosecute a private clinic if it violates the Canada Health Act.

After tremendous public pressure, the government enacted two elements of the Medicare Protection Amendment Act in order to deal with violations of federal and provincial statutes by the clinic, said B.C. Health Minister George Abbott.

The move provides the Medical Services Commission the authority to audit the clinic and ask for an injunction, Abbott said.

Premier Gordon Campbell said private clinics can expect to be prosecuted if they offer urgent services in British Columbia that would be paid for under the public health system because they break the Canada Health Act.

Pharmacists get power to prescribe

- Early in November the Alberta government gave pharmacists the power to prescribe drugs and administer some injections. Pharmacists’ new roles will begin April 1 next year. The Alberta College of Physicians supported the move, but the Alberta Medical Association was actively warning patients. “It will be patient beware,” AMA President Gerry Kiefer told the media. “We support pharmacists prescribing in a collaborative team setting, but we continue to have concerns about them prescribing independently without physicians being involved,” he said.

Saskatchewan nurses say they are short nearly 1,000 RNs/RPNs

- The Saskatchewan Union of Nurses (SUN) has concluded their second Staffing for Professional Standards audit. The results from the 2005 audit showed 250 fulltime equivalent (FTE) vacancies and a need for an additional 300 registered nurse/registered psychiatric nurse (RN/RPN) positions.

One year later, the October 2006 SUN audit of the province's Regional Health Authorities has revealed 579 vacancies for RNs and RPNs; this is equivalent to 464.5 full time positions – a 71.6% increase in vacant positions since October 2005. Nurses have also identified that an additional 268.5 (FTE) RNs and RPNs are required to provide adequate baseline staffing to ensure agencies can meet professional standards. This shortage has forced the closure of 253 hospital beds, negatively affecting admissions and wait times, and producing a vicious cycle.

“More vacancies and more bed closures are looming. We know that 40% of our RN workforce reached age 50 or more last year. This year alone, 485 of those nurses over 50 become eligible for retirement.” said Rosalee Longmoore, SUN President.

New regulation allows pension transfers between PSPP and LAPP

- In October, the Alberta government formalized a new reciprocal agreement, which allows employees to transfer pension service between the two major public pension plans. This affects employees who are active members in either the Local Authorities Pension Plan (LAPP) or the Public Service Pension Plan (PSPP) and who have entitlements in both plans.

After January 1, 2007, Alberta Pensions Administration (APA) Corporation will provide eligible members with transfer choice packages based on the new reciprocal transfer agreement. If you are eligible, you will receive one of these packages in the mail, and it will help you decide if you would like to transfer your entitlements from PSPP to LAPP or vice versa.

UNA members who formerly worked under the Alberta Mental Health Board, in the Public Service Pension Plan will be the main group affected by this change.

The transfer agreement provides a formula for calculating how much pension benefit will be credited in your new plan. People transferring may also have the opportunity to “top up” the entitlement from their previous plan that they are bringing in to the new plan.

More information, including a detailed Question and Answer section, is available on the LAPP website at <http://www.lapp.ab.ca>

Ontario close to law on safe needles

- The Ontario Legislature is considering a private members' bill that would require hospitals and doctors' offices to use safety-engineered needles. New Democrat Shelley Martel said her private members' bill could prevent about 33,000 needle injuries a year. The safer needles are designed to retract into covers as soon as they are used.

The governing Liberals allowed the bill to pass second reading but it seems unlikely they will actually pass it into law. Liberal Monique Smith said the government has already given hospitals \$11 million for safety-engineered needles.

But she said some procedures — such as spinal taps, bone marrows and acupuncture — couldn't be done with such needles.

While hospitals that have voluntarily brought in a safe needle program have experienced fewer injuries, Smith said the programs are more costly.

AMA contract talks stalled because of leadership race

- Alberta doctors are in on-going contract talks with the provincial government and the Health Regions but it appears that the talks are stalled because of the Conservative leadership vacuum. “There appears to be an inertia in government with little appetite for making major financial decisions (such as completing our negotiations) until a new leader is elected,” says new Alberta Medical Association President Dr. Gerry Kiefer in a letter to AMA members. The doctor's cite the physician shortage numbers and rising overhead costs as strong reasons to increase the doctors' pay. They are

also negotiating for continuation of the Physician Office System Program (POSP) funding, which pays doctors to computerize their offices, and for more Primary Care initiatives. Only 20 Primary Care initiatives are in operation so far. Under the initiative the doctors receive \$50 per patient enrolled with a Primary Care group, as well as the doctor's regular fee-for-service. The doctors signed an eight-year master agreement in 2003. But it provided for renewed money talks after three years, which came up March 31, 2006.

Forgotten families: conference on globalization and the health of Canadians

- A research conference on how globalization affects determinants of health is coming up in Edmonton February 6-8, 2007. The conference brings together population health researchers from across the country. Their work emphasizes that population health is affected by much more than just health care. The talks focus on how globalization affects social determinants of health for low-income families with children in Canada's major metropolitan areas. The speakers will also identify best social policy practices from the experiences of other countries and explore Canada's policy options for the future.

The list of prominent speakers includes Ronald Labonte, Armine Yalnizyan from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Diana Gibson, research director at Parkland Institute.

Canadian Institutes of Health Research is putting on the conference to launch a research network on population health. For more information: <http://www.ualberta.ca/PARKLAND/forgotten/index.html>

ON THE LIGHTER SIDE

How is the patient who swallowed ten quarters, the doctor asked the nurse.

No change yet, she replied.