

UNASTAT

UNITED NURSES OF ALBERTA NEWS UPDATE FOR MEMBERS

UNA set to deal with “superboard”

- The new “superboard” (Alberta Health Services) has – or soon will – taken over operations of all the Regional Health Authorities, the Alberta Cancer Board and the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission.

The transition to the AHSB appears to be moving slowly, and there are far more questions than there are answers about how health care will be structured.

The Labour Relations Code requires that for direct nursing care, there be one bargaining unit per Region. Since there will only be one region, this means that there will be a Province-wide bargaining unit (for those employed by Alberta Health Services.)

The UNA provincial Executive Board recently decided to create a committee responsible for negotiating any necessary changes to the collective agreement in order to make it effective in a province-wide certificate with one single employer. UNA District meetings are electing one representative from each Regional Health Authority, and one representative from the Alberta Cancer Board. One representative from AADAC will be added if UNA receives additional members there.

Covenant: new Catholic health superboard

- Sixteen Catholic health care facilities across Alberta are now under a single board and administration and have a new name: Covenant Health. The new organization will direct and manage Catholic facilities in 11 communities across Alberta with a total of almost 2,400 beds and a total budget of over \$514 million.

UNA funding 15 members to Labour School

- UNA recently held a draw to send 15 members to the annual Alberta Federation of Labour/Canadian Labour Congress Labour School. The provincial Executive Board gave preference in the draw to members who had NOT attended before. 15 members from right across the province were selected to attend the school which is held in January in Jasper.

Liepert opens door for more private insurance for prescriptions

- Health minister Ron Liepert announced a new pharma plan for seniors this week that will dramatically hike costs for 40 per cent of seniors in the province and for people who buy Blue Cross non-group coverage.

“There should not be a sense of entitlement when you turn 65,” Liepert said in a scrum at the Legislature.

NDP Leader Brian Mason pointed out that the change is “opening the door” to private health insurance firms. David Eggen from Friends of Medicare said it is “shooting holes” in universal health care coverage.

National report calls for free universal pharmacare

- While Alberta is opening up the market for more private insurance for prescriptions, a new report from the Canadian Health Coalition says a national universal free pharmacare plan is the real way to control pharmaceutical costs.

Many Canadians have no drug coverage at all, and those who do are facing exorbitant and ever-increasing costs. “Too many Canadians are falling through the cracks. Now is the time for coordinated government action on a universal public drug plan,” said Kathleen Connors, CHC Chairperson. “In this serious economic downturn, Canadians are losing their drug plans as they lose their jobs. A full public Pharmacare plan will not only provide medically-necessary drugs to all Canadians, regardless of where they live or work, it will also create more efficient spending in the health care system. We’ll get more and pay less,” added Connors.

Vision 2020 lays ground for health privatization

- The release of yet another health care vision for the province should alert Albertans to carefully watch what government is doing with our public health system, says UNA.

“This government and health minister Ron Liepert have been very secretive about their health care plans,” says United Nurses of Alberta President Heather Smith. “The new 2020 document remains vague, but there are some disturbing indications they continue to pursue private for-profit health delivery. This looks more like vision 1920 than it does progress for the future.”

A key component in “2020” is moving health services out of hospitals into what they call “short stay, non-hospital facilities and other clinic-type arrangements as an alternative to hospitalization”.

“Moving from public hospitals to services in for-profit private clinics or hospitals is not going to save anyone money,” says Heather Smith. “As we have seen demonstrated by the recent national study, the growth of private clinics leads to higher costs for citizens and to longer waiting times when health professionals are pulled out of public services.”

Heather Smith points out that a public acute care hospital has all the services under one roof: x-ray, diagnostic services, doctors, nurses, treatment facilities and pharmacies.

“With separate clinics, people already get shuffled around from doctor’s office to labs, to diagnostics with waits at every step. We tend to forget how efficient our public hospitals are for patients.”

Liepert appoints corporate-style health board

- On November 20th, the government announced it was appointing a former drug company rep who lives in New Jersey, along with a range of private business people to run the province’s Alberta Health Services Board.

NDP Leader Brian Mason said the appointments were “the clearest signal yet” the government tends to move toward American-style business health care.

At the same time AHSB chair Ken Hughes told the Calgary Herald “There’s going to have to be tighter belts. We are going to change the way we deliver health care in Alberta.”

Health superboard COO resigns

- The chief operating officer of Alberta’s new health super board has left his position, in December after Edmonton-Gold Bar Liberal MLA Hugh MacDonald pointed out Jim Saunders has a history of promoting private health care. MacDonald asked Liepert for a guarantee there would be no private health initiatives implemented in Alberta.
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Document references health spending limit law

- The Alberta Liberals released a document that talks about a new law to put a lid on health care spending.

A job advertisement circulated by the executive search firm Egon Zehnder International specifies the new head of the Alberta Health Services Board will be responsible for legislation to contain costs in the health care system.

The document says one of the roles of the permanent Chief Executive Officer will be “continued improvement of the AHS’s financial position through the prioritization of initiatives within the context of proposed new legislation which will impose constraints on growth and costs in health care province-wide.”

Rich deal for Alberta docs

- Earlier this month Ron Liepert, together with the Alberta Health Services Board announced they’d reached a deal with the Alberta Medical Association that includes a 5% increase retroactive to April 1, 5% next April 1 and 4.5% in April 2010. But the increases in fees, is only part of the bargain, which according to political watcher Mark Lisac is “an expensive deal”. Lisac looks at the global budget figures and gets a 14% increase this year, 11.5% in 2009 and 6.9% in 2010.
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Long-term care announcement next week?

- There is also a rumour that Health Minister Ron Liepert will make an announcement of a new long-term care strategic plan next week. All signs point to a continued “Chinookification” of long-term care. That means closing full service nursing homes and shuffling the residents over to privately-run assisted living facilities. Assisted living of course does without the expense of on-site Registered Nurses. Also, in assisted living residents are expected to pay “a la carte” for many services, including things like assistance with having a bath.
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