



Bargaining Bulletin

HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

THE HEART OF HEALTH CARE

Member presentations reinforce union bargaining proposals

Front-line health care workers underscored the need for measures to address retention and recruitment, workload overload, and increased responsibilities and training in presentations to health employers at facilities bargaining Thursday.

Representing nursing unit assistants (unit clerks/coordinators) and a cross-section of patient care technical occupations, the nine-member HEU panel reinforced the bargaining proposals tabled last week, including the need for benchmark reviews and restoring fair wages.

Members spoke about the challenge of retaining skilled staff at substandard wages, the impact of the wage rollback, the reality of working more than one job, and how their workloads have increased dramatically over the past five years due to funding cuts and shortages of other health care professionals.

Doug Purvey, an orthopaedic technologist at Surrey Memorial Hospital, explained that he is one of only 12 ortho techs in the entire province, and there is no school in BC for training. Purvey, who had to take his course

in Ontario, described training medical students and nurses on how to set bones and casts, and how an emergency nurse replaces him on vacation, but is only qualified to do half of his job duties. And he only earns \$20.54 an hour.

Vancouver General Hospital sterile processing technician Doris Santic echoed the staff shortage in her field. She had been on a three-year waiting list at Vancouver Community College when she took her course in 1997. Santic, also an instructor for the college, told the health employers that over the last two years, less than a dozen students were registered each year and there is currently no waiting list.

Kimberlea Stuparyk, a buyer from Prince George Regional Hospital, and Glenn Ottenbreit, an ophthalmic photographer from VGH, compared their wages to counterparts in other provinces, including Alberta where ophthalmic photographers make 59 per cent higher wages. Buyers are being advertised at \$33.22 an hour on the employment website Workopolis.

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And Maureen Griffin of Burnaby Hospital reported on a day in the life of a pharmacy technician, highlighting the additional roles and responsibilities taken on by HEU members due to the shortage of pharmacists. In the main dispensary, pharmacy technicians process physicians' orders and dispense medication, then rotate through sub-departments within the pharmacy, including supplying wards with stock medications, preparing IV antibiotics and narcotics, coordinating drug purchasing and inventory, and preparing chemotherapy treatments. Technicians are now required to check each other's work since a pharmacist is often on the wards doing clinical work.

The Facilities Bargaining Association has now tabled a comprehensive package that includes proposals to recover lost ground, recognize diverse skills and changing roles (benchmark reviews and special adjustments), address workload overload, encourage stability for stronger public health care, and to make other general improvements to the contract.

Bargaining – for 38,000 hospital and long-term care workers – resumes next week.

HEU presenters at the bargaining table:

- **Doris Santic** – Sterile Processing Technician – Vancouver General Hospital
- **Kimberlea Stuparyk** – Buyer – Prince George Regional Hospital
- **Janine Brooker** – Renal Dialysis Technician – Royal Columbian Hospital
- **Glenn Ottenbreit** – Ophthalmic Photographer – Eye Care Centre (VGH)
- **Susan Barron** – Senior Lab Technical Assistant – Royal Jubilee Hospital
- **Maureen Griffin** – Pharmacy Technician – Burnaby Hospital
- **Michele McCready** – Nursing Unit Assistant – Kelowna General Hospital
- **Bob Wade** – Nursing Unit Assistant – Vancouver General Hospital
- **Doug Purvey** – Registered Orthopaedic Technologist – Surrey Memorial Hospital