



Health employers urged to pick up pace at Facilities bargaining table

With just over a month remaining before the current collective agreement expires, health unions are looking for concrete progress in contract talks covering 47,000 health workers.

Bonnie Pearson, spokesperson for the multi-union Facilities Bargaining Association, says that while both the unions and employer have tabled their packages, moving forward will require the Health Employers Association of BC (HEABC) to show more flexibility.

“Employers say they have little room to move under the government mandate yet they insist on tabling petty and provocative demands that block progress,” says Pearson, also secretary-business manager for the Hospital Employees’ Union.

Pearson says HEABC has targeted sick leave payout, vacation scheduling, and members’ access to union representation and union leave, when they should be concentrating on issues where there is a shared interest.

“Our bargaining committee remains focused on priorities like workload, excessive overtime and improved shift rotations,” says Pearson. “Addressing these items will help us improve care and service levels while reducing injuries and benefit costs.”

Government and health employers still refuse to address long-standing bargaining issues advanced on behalf of CUPE 873’s ambulance paramedics and dispatchers working at the BC Ambulance Service and BCGEU Emergency Health Service workers.

“In fact, they appear to be more interested in tabling demands that circumvent or undermine the bargaining process than engaging in a meaningful dialogue,” says Pearson.

The bargaining committee is also focusing on job security. Contracting-out protection stripped from the collective agreement by legislation in 2002 was renegotiated into the 2012–2014 agreement, but expires on March 30.

The current collective agreement expires one day later, though most provisions – with the exception of contracting-out language – remain in force until a new agreement is settled.

HEU represents about 85 per cent of health care workers covered by these talks. A further 14 per cent are represented by CUPE Local 873, the B.C. Government and Service Employees’ Union, and the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 882/882H.

A further seven unions represent less than one per cent of workers in the FBA. They’re represented at the table by the Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers Local 5.

The bargaining unit includes care aides, ambulance paramedics, health records staff, lab and other diagnostic specialists, sterile supply technicians, emergency dispatch personnel, trades and maintenance workers, activity aides and rehab assistants, IT specialists, pharmacy technicians, admitting and booking clerks, administrative staff, cleaning and dietary staff, and many others.

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