



Newsletter

Patient Care Technical delegates take issue with substandard wages, out-dated benchmarks

More than 100 HEU members who deliver patient care technical services met in Vancouver on September 29 and 30 to develop bargaining priorities and discuss issues related to the complex and specialized jobs they perform in BC's health care facilities.

Patient care technical is an occupational group that includes numerous highly-skilled job classifications that are not well understood, but absolutely essential to every area of patient care.

It's a job family that includes buyers, ophthalmology technicians, sterile supply technicians, pharmacy technicians, renal technicians, cardiology technologists, lab assistants, OR technicians, orthopaedic technicians, certified dental assistants, x-ray assistants, food service supervisors, pathology attendants, information technologists, and more.

Bargaining priorities identified during the two-day forum included wages, benchmarks and job classification, employer-paid education, workload, a shorter work-week, job security and no concessions to the benefits package.

Most attending delegates reported a dramatic expansion in the scope and responsibilities of their work - as a direct result of an increasing shortage of technologists and other health care specialists - and took issue with wages that are out of step with industry standards as well as seriously out-dated benchmarks that no longer reflect the reality of their jobs.

And while most members in this career area require ongoing training and skills upgrading, few are given educational opportunities by their employer.

Many pay annual fees to professional associations to keep their jobs. And because some fields are so specialized, delegates say they are often called upon to teach other members of the health care team with no recognition or additional compensation.

In several specialized areas, members report that sub-standard wages and crushing workloads have led to a situation where health facilities are not able to maintain a casual work force, or compete with private labs, clinics and other industries for new employees.

Contracting-out, privatization and regionalization were also cited as emerging workplace challenges impacting job security and workload.

In addition to identifying bargaining priorities and developing skills to promote the value of their work, delegates also had an opportunity to address their concerns about the union's structure and operations with members of HEU's Task Force for a New Union.



HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy thanked delegates for their willingness to speak openly and candidly about their concerns and encouraged them to make sure their voices are heard at the local level.

As one delegate said early in the meeting, "We need to get people involved again. But to do that we've got to believe in ourselves. There's strength in numbers."

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