



## HEU calls for safe work and fair pay

The Hospital Employees' Union is repeating its call for safe working conditions and fair pay in response to a wage boost health employers and government have provided to nurses.

The Health Employers Association of BC (HEABC) recently agreed to pay a working short premium to all nurses covered under their provincial master agreement for at least the month of April.

The premium, negotiated in the last round of provincial bargaining, was to be restricted to nursing units where short-staffing had been identified by managers and nurses. But HEABC failed to complete this work and has instead agreed to pay the premium to all nurses.

HEU secretary-business manager Jennifer Whiteside says the broad application of this premium to all nurses will cause huge morale problems among the tens of thousands of health care workers who work beside them on the frontlines of the COVID-19 response.

“I understand that health employers have been preoccupied with pandemic preparedness and have not been able to do their due diligence with regard to the nurses’ working short premium,” says Whiteside.

“But the decision to apply the premium to all nurses while ignoring the rest of the health care team sends a troubling message to frontline workers – a message that their contributions are less valued.

“To be clear, our union is not looking for hazard pay. We need safe work and fair pay, not hazard pay for dangerous work. This includes access to Personal Protective Equipment. It is the employers’ responsibility to ensure safe workplaces.

“But working in health care during the pandemic is stressful and expensive. We believe that more needs to be done to provide for the increased meal costs, alternate accommodation, child care and elder care expenses, and other pressures faced by those on the frontlines.

“There must also be a recognition that a health care worker is a health care worker. The inequities between health care worker wages and working conditions within our health care system must be addressed.

*... more*

*Page two*

“That’s why we pushed hard for government to ensure that workers restricted to single sites as part of the COVID-19 response have their wages raised to provincial standard rates. That commitment has been made by government.

“There are other inequities that must be addressed. Hospital housekeepers are key to keeping our facilities virus free. Yet in our major hospitals, they are paid less today than they were during the SARS crisis 17 years ago – the result of privatization. Same with dietary workers.

“Employers and government are asking a lot of health care workers during this crisis. We’re asking that health care workers be treated fairly.”

*April 1, 2020*