



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

# BARGAINING BULLETIN

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## HEU's Pro Vita bargaining committee calls for a strong strike mandate

*Voting for Qualicum Gardens' care aides set for December 4 from 1:00 to 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the Bayside Quality Inn in Parksville*

HEU's Pro Vita bargaining committee is asking members for a strong strike mandate following the employer's final monetary offer, which fails to address the substandard wages currently being paid to care aides at Qualicum Gardens.

The committee says the wage rate for care aides at Qualicum is well-below those paid in every other South Island facility, and must be addressed in this round of bargaining.

The employer's final offer – which included minor, agreed-upon housekeeping items and retaining the current collective agreement with an additional two per cent increase per year for three years – was presented during an October 28 bargaining session, in response to union proposals tabled on September 30.

“Our wages are lower than all the other facilities,” says bargaining committee member Patricia Walker. “We're often working short-staffed and we have huge workloads. All this makes for intolerable working conditions that ultimately undermine our ability to provide quality care for our residents.

“A two per cent increase in each of the next three years will do nothing to help build or keep a stable care staff in our facility.”

Although Pro Vita has acknowledged the recruitment and retention problems at the site, it has only been willing to forward those concerns to the managing company at Qualicum Gardens – Chartwell Seniors Housing – which subcontracts its care services to Pro Vita.

And to date, Chartwell has been unwilling to open up the commercial contract between the two companies and discuss any potential adjustments that may be required to provide care staff with fair wage increases.

Having reached this impasse, the bargaining committee has scheduled a strike vote for December 4 at the Bayside Quality Inn in Parksville.

“These companies have a responsibility to provide decent caring and working conditions for their residents and staff,” says bargaining committee member Darlene Whitlock.

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“Dodging that responsibility is simply unacceptable.”

Whitlock says that once there's a strong strike mandate in place, the union's first step will be to contact both Pro Vita and Chartwell to look at how these issues can be resolved without having to resort to job action.

If talks at that stage are not successful, she says, the process leading to job action – which begins by setting essential services levels – will be set in motion.

“We fully recognize that by standing up for ourselves and the seniors we care for, Chartwell may cancel its contract with ProVita. And that means layoffs. But the situation as it now stands cannot be allowed to continue,” says Whitlock.

“At some point, we have to be able to draw a line in the sand and insist these companies do the right thing. Substandard wages inevitably lead to substandard services and that's what's got to stop.”

HEU's first collective agreement with Pro Vita, covering 60 care aides at Qualicum Gardens, expired in August.

If you need more information or clarification, please contact one of your bargaining committee members:

*Darlene Whitlock: 250-468-9663*

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