



Page 209 facilities benchmark review negotiations continue this fall

Talks between the Facilities Bargaining Association and the Health Employers Association of B.C. continued over the spring and summer on pathology, social service assistant, medical/health records technician, and stores benchmarks, as part of the benchmark review series outlined on page 209 of the collective agreement.

This fall, discussions on applying the \$2 million benchmark adjustment fund, negotiated in 2006 bargaining, will only include those benchmarks where revised language has been agreed to by the union and employer. If there's no agreement on both language and an appropriate wage grid for a revised benchmark, then no changes will be made and the current benchmark and wage rate will remain in place.

Social Service Assistant benchmarks

Both parties agreed on changes to the Social Service Assistant I benchmark, including updating qualifications to read "graduation from a Social Service Worker certificate program or an equivalent combination of education, training and experience." But HEABC would not agree to the union's proposal to improve the language on the Social Service Assistant II and III benchmarks. Instead, the employer suggested downgrading the language. Members matched to this benchmark usually perform counselling, advocacy and treatment interventions in mental health or addiction recovery services.

Pathology Attendant benchmarks

Revised language for the Pathology Attendant I benchmark was agreed to at the May meetings. Changes describe the more independent role pathology attendants have in performing autopsy procedures and recognize the skills and expertise required to perform some procedures before the pathologist arrives. As well, the revised language describes how a Pathology Attendant I can assist in doing forensic and academic work. HEABC indicated that these changes were significant enough to warrant an increase to the benchmark pay grid, though they would not commit to a particular grid rate at this point.

The revised Pathology Attendant II and III benchmarks also have some language changes. It was recognized that they supervise or oversee pathology attendants, who will now have a higher degree of responsibility. HEU will seek a grid rate increase for these benchmarks during monetary talks in the fall.

HEU raised the issue of members providing training in autopsy procedures, but once

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again, the employer committee would not agree to include this duty or compensate members who provide the training.

Medical/Health Records Technician (HRT) benchmarks

The union and employer committees met on June 28 to discuss language changes to the Medical/Health Records Technician benchmark.

HEU proposed changing the benchmark duties to better describe the quality assurance, coding and abstracting, and freedom of information tasks, statistical/reporting work, and general enquiry work members perform. The union argued that this work needs an increase in pay – especially when members' duties overlap with Health Records Administrators (HRAs), who make considerably more money. The union committee was prepared to change the benchmark qualifications to reflect the two-year Health Information Management Program, however the employer was not interested.

HEABC and their employer representatives would not work with the union committee to address changes in the health records profession or discuss the skills and knowledge HRTs bring to their jobs each day. The employer committee was clearly not interested in a wage increase for HRTs, and stated the direction they have taken – to reduce HRT positions over time and increase HRA positions – would not change.

To hear that the employer committee was not interested in supporting HRTs with all their skills, experience and knowledge was very upsetting. Since the employer would not agree to benchmark language or wage grid changes, HRT positions will not have access to the \$2 million fund described on page 209 of the collective agreement. HEU will be considering what the next steps might be in a different process.

Stores benchmark

Talks on Stores benchmarks continue to the end of July.

For each round of negotiations, HEU staff have consulted with members around the province, and a small committee of members from each job has been at the talks with the employer committee. Members have provided valuable input, examples and evidence. Committee members have been very concrete, articulate and persuasive in providing evidence and suggestions. We could not have seen the progress made so far without them.

Talks on changes to pay grids and utilization of the \$2 million fund outlined in the page 209 Letter of Agreement will be held in the fall. Check the union website for updates.

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