



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

# NEWSLETTER

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## HEU calls for open, transparent bargaining approach in wake of early deal for doctors and RNs

*Labour market adjustments must be applied fairly across health care sector*

Government is sending out confusing and contradictory messages about its mandate for future negotiations with health care workers and the rest of the public sector, says the Hospital Employees' Union.

“Last month, the government publicly announced a two-year wage freeze for all workers,” says secretary-business manager Judy Darcy. “Now they’ve made exceptions to this policy based on criteria that have not been made clear.”

Darcy says that’s not just poor public policy – it’s poor labour relations policy as well.

In a letter to the provincial health minister George Abbott, Darcy says pressing recruitment and retention issues cannot be ignored. She points out that labour market adjustments to wage rates of hard-to-fill jobs in health care must be applied fairly and effectively across the sector.

“If government is committing resources to provide labour market adjustments, there are a number of job classifications in our union that qualify,” says Darcy. “There’s no reason to wait until the expiry of our current agreement to deal with those issues.”

For example, prior to the 2006 round of bargaining, HEU negotiated adjustments to the compensation package of skilled trades workers to address serious shortages for these classifications.

In the letter to Abbott, HEU also raised concerns about the lack of transparency surrounding recent contract extensions.

Over a number of months, HEU repeatedly asked the Health Employers Association of BC (HEABC) about their timeframe for bargaining, and was told there were no plans for early negotiations.

The union was also assured that if negotiations with one union were to proceed, all health unions would be afforded the same opportunity. More recently, HEABC told HEU that the window for negotiations was closed.

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“A more productive approach would have been an open and transparent process with a reasonable timeframe that would allow for consultation with our members and other unions in the Facilities Bargaining Association,” says Darcy.

“We would not renegotiate without a mandate from our members,” she says. “We’ve been clear about that.

“And in order to protect our members’ interests, we would need to understand any trade-offs or concessions government would be seeking in order to reach an early deal.”

*March 18, 2009*