



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

# NEWSLETTER

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## Delegates at HEU's 18<sup>th</sup> Wage Policy conference make solidarity order of the day

*Job security, special wage adjustments, protecting benefits are the top bargaining priorities*

Solidarity was evident from start to finish at the 18th Wage Policy conference of the Hospital Employees' Union as 271 delegates from across B.C. gathered in Richmond on November 2, 3 and 4 to discuss bargaining demands, set priorities, and elect their bargaining committee in preparation for negotiations for a new facilities subsector collective agreement.

Delegates were united in their goal to obtain fair collective agreements, something that was apparent right from the first event, a special evening forum on November 2.

There they heard presentations from members representing community social services, community health and the facilities subsector's five occupational families – patient care, patient care technical, support, clerical, and trades and maintenance – on their work, the impact of government cuts, and bargaining priorities these groups had established in earlier occupational and sector conferences.

B.C. Federation of Labour president Jim Sinclair was a guest at the forum and wrapped up the night with a strong unity message and an appreciation of HEU members' work, saying, "Hearing what you do every day – it's humbling.

"At the end of the day, it's not about money. Health care is about people. Thank you for doing your work."

In her report to the conference the next morning, HEU secretary-business manager Judy Darcy outlined the challenges of bargaining in today's economic climate – the B.C. government's public sector wage freeze, the huge provincial deficit and more cuts to health care that are negatively affecting patients and residents as well as workers.

However, Darcy also emphasized the strengths that members bring to the table.

"We are the solution when it comes to meeting health care's challenges," Darcy said. "There are 270 job classifications in the Facilities Subsector. And each one of them is part of the solution."

And Darcy, too, noted the power of solidarity. "When we stand united to protect services and decent jobs, not only for ourselves but for everyone who depends on them – we are stronger. And that's exactly what we're going to do."

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Over two days of deliberations, the top bargaining priorities established are:

- job security provisions that cover contracting-out and other organizational initiatives including the Shared Services Organization, consolidation and de-accreditation, and provide expanded options in the event of layoffs;
- special wage adjustments for LPNs, nursing unit assistants and certain other occupations with significantly increased responsibilities, educational requirements or recruitment and retention problems;
- protection of benefits, and
- recognition for on-the-job training responsibilities.

Delegates also supported:

- training, education and skills building to address career development and recruitment and retention;
- policy tables where discussions with employers and government regarding utilization, best practices and other areas that directly impact quality of care lead to implementation on the ground;
- occupational health and safety, particularly the reduction of injury rates and violence in the workplace, and a call for environmental stewards who would champion green initiatives in health care, and
- ever-increasing workload without recognition or compensation.

The newly elected members of HEU's provincial bargaining committee are Debera Willis (LPN, 100 Mile House), Jim Kelly (computer technical support, Vancouver General local), Chris Duckett (plumber, Powell River local), Joanne Dickie (LPN, Lions Gate local), Laura Neil (administrative support, Royal Jubilee local), Marina Beauchamp (accounting assistant, Kelowna Amalgamated local), John Gillies (LPN, Royal Jubilee local), Jim Calvin (nursing assistant I, Chilliwack Amalgamated local), Josh Charette (stores attendant, FHA Support Services local), and Joyce Beddow (nurse aide, Ashcroft local).

Darcy said that HEU members are more than up for negotiating new collective agreements in tough times and have their eye on the bigger picture. "Delegates have demonstrated real recognition of our diversity. And they're prepared to support both common issues and issues specific to particular groups at the bargaining table.

"Because, in HEU, solidarity is not just a song we sing. We practice what we preach."

*November 6, 2009*