



HOSPITAL EMPLOYEES' UNION

# NEWSLETTER

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## Patient care job family wraps up HEU's pre-bargaining conference series

Nearly 160 representatives from the union's patient care family met in Richmond (September 27-29) to prepare for bargaining through a series of member-based occupational conferences. The facilities subsector collective agreement is set to expire on March 31, 2012.

Over the course of three days, participants from across the province rolled up their sleeves to get down to business. And there was plenty of business to conduct.



The biggest of the union's pre-bargaining conferences, patient care representatives – including licensed practical nurses, care aides, activity workers, program coordinators, patient porters/transport; recreation therapists and programmers; rehab, nursing, peri-operative and social work assistants; mental health workers, and ward aides – brainstormed in small groups and participated in large plenary discussions as they streamlined their bargaining priorities.

Their short list of bargaining priorities will be forwarded by the Provincial Executive to the Facilities Bargaining Conference in November.

The patient care group represents nearly half of the union's membership in 20 job classifications. During the conference, members spoke passionately about their work, and



shared candid and moving stories about their workplace challenges – such as heavier workloads; expanded roles; downloading of duties; changes to professional practice; inconsistent benchmarks, job descriptions, utilization and scopes of practice; exposure to violence and bullying; lack of equipment availability and maintenance (like lifts, transfer belts, slings); short-staffing with unsafe patient/resident ratios; scheduling; lack of funding for recreational programs and activities; no compensation for precepting or training students and new

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staff; inadequate education and training to care for residents/patients with higher acuity levels, mental health issues and dual or multiple diagnoses; and other OH&S concerns (infection control, ergonomics).



The occupational conference series was also an opportunity for Judy Darcy, who resigned earlier this month to pursue provincial politics, to say goodbye to HEU members, and thank them for their dedication and support.

“This is very emotional for me,” said Darcy, “as this is my last HEU conference speaking at the podium.

I’m so proud to have represented you for the past six and a half years. Health care has always been close to my heart, and HEU members and health care will continue to be close to my heart in all things that I do.”

Darcy received a rousing standing ovation as she introduced HEU’s new secretary-business manager Bonnie Pearson.

“I want to personally thank you, Judy,” said Pearson. “It’s been a real run and I wouldn’t have missed it for anything. And it’s never over. There will always be a place and a seat in the room for you, sister.”

In her introductory remarks, Pearson introduced conference attendees to her replacement, assistant secretary-business manager Jacquie de Aguayo, formerly HEU’s director of legal services.

During the conference, members participated in unity-building and advocacy workshops, heard reports from the union’s research director Chris Kinkaid, and attended workshops on health and safety (patient handling, work-life balance), and LPN course curriculum changes and regulations to move their profession forward with an opportunity for greater autonomy. They also took part in presentations by the union’s communications director Mike Old on the value of social networking, and de Aguayo on classifications and benchmarks.



In her well-received, lively and informative bargaining address, Pearson gave a broad brush stroke of B.C.’s economic and political climate and its impact on public sector bargaining.

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She also emphasized how critical unity is within the union's membership when going to the bargaining table.

"We are stronger together – from job family to job family, occupation to occupation," said Pearson. "When we stand together in solidarity, we can achieve gains for each other. We know that our work matters. And on our team, everyone counts."

She emphasized the importance of continuing to educate the public, politicians, our communities, and even our families about the work HEU members do.



Putting it into context, Pearson shared a personal story about her granddaughter phoning her for a university project to profile her work. "I realized she knew all the words – grievance, collective bargaining, arbitrations – but she didn't have a clue about what I do," joked Pearson. "And I've spent a lot of time with that kid. She taught me ballet. The least I can do is teach her about feminism, social justice and trade unionism. So don't assume that your families know what you're facing. But we need that support – from our families, from our communities – they need to know how critical we are to the health care system. They need to know what we do, and we need to tell them."



Picking up on that theme in her closing remarks, HEU financial secretary Donisa Bernardo assigned homework to the participants. "As leaders, you need to go back to your locals, back to your communities, your friends, your families and tell everybody you meet what HEU members do. Tell them what your job is. Tell them what your HEU sisters and brothers do. Together, we can raise our public profile so that all British Columbians recognize the valuable contribution you make in delivering quality care in this province."

Bernardo added that the union would mark Health Care Assistant Day on October 18 to celebrate the contributions of care aides and community health workers.

Wrapping up the session, HEU president Ken Robinson highlighted the strong collaboration required between each job family to make the overall health care system function, and echoed the conference series' unity theme. "HEU has never been given anything that we didn't have to fight for," said Robinson. "So we need to work together and be united, until we achieve a collective agreement that works for our members, not this government."