

# LPNs: A HISTORY OF ACTIVISM

*The Hospital Employees' Union has represented licensed practical nurses since 1948.*

Over the decades, LPNs have distinguished themselves as dedicated caregivers and strong union activists, speaking out for their own rights and those of their patients or residents. They've faced numerous challenges within BC's changing health care climate. And as union members, they have taken on important leadership roles at the local and provincial levels.

- HEU's 1974-1975 collective agreement secured "equal pay for equal work" by eliminating wage discrimination between practical nurses and orderlies.
- In the 1980s, the health care system moved to a more RN-focused model of care, which resulted in LPN displacements and other set backs.
- During the mid-1990s, HEU began organizing nursing team conferences to tackle training, professional development, practice and utilization issues, which paved the way for important gains in the 1998 and 2001 rounds of bargaining.
- In 1998, HEU negotiated funding to conduct a joint study with HEABC on LPN and care aide roles, which reinforced the need for broader utilization and increased training for LPNs.
- Then in 2001, the union successfully bargained for funding to increase LPN positions in long-term and extended care facilities as well as extended care units in acute care hospitals.
- In recent years, a shortage of nurses and other health care professionals has led to an expanded role for LPNs. New licensing standards have required educational upgrades for LPNs to achieve their full-scope of practice and increased union advocacy for training support.
- Despite a growing crisis in health care, the BC Liberals legislated a 15 per cent wage rollback in 2004 bargaining. In an effort to regain some lost ground in the immediate, the union negotiated pay equity adjustments of \$193 (or 5.3 per cent) a month for LPNs.
- In the fall of 2005, LPNs from across the province gathered at an HEU patient care conference to discuss workplace challenges, build networks, and set priorities for the next round of bargaining.



The recently ratified 2006-2010 facilities collective agreement will see LPN wages rise by 15.1 per cent compounded over the next four years; funding for continued education and post-basic training; input into scheduling; inclusion in professional practice councils, and several policy table agreements (see side bar).

## WHAT WE ACHIEVED AT THE 2006 POLICY TABLES

1

A commitment to fund post-basic, leadership and other training for LPNs.

2

LPN representation on professional practice councils.

3

LPN representation on an FBA Joint Policy Committee charged with a process to improve and support the broader LPN utilization across the province.

4

An official recognition of LPN leadership roles in mentoring and preceptorship.

5

Formalized input by LPNs in the creation of shift schedules and rotations.

6

A commitment from the Ministry of Health and BC's health authorities to work with LPNs and health care unions to eliminate or minimize the incidence of workplace violence.

