

Facilities Bargaining Association

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Health unions seek strike mandate to get talks on track

Health care unions representing 47,000 health care workers are seeking a strike mandate from members to back efforts to reach an agreement with B.C.'s health employers.

The 11-union Facilities Bargaining Association says that talks have stalled on a number of issues including health employers' refusal to extend employment security provisions, a move that would open up health care to further privatization and put decent jobs at risk.

"Health employers' demands for more contracting out will cause uncertainty and instability in our hospitals, care facilities and in the community," says Bonnie Pearson, the FBA's chief negotiator and secretary-business manager of the Hospital Employees' Union.

The current provision in the collective agreement that protects services against contracting out expires on Sunday. It was renegotiated into the agreement in 2012 for the first time since it was removed by legislation 10 years earlier. The Supreme Court of Canada later ruled that law unconstitutional.

Pearson says health employers are refusing to take steps to improve health and safety in the province's most dangerous workplaces. And they've rejected proposals to improve health service delivery by expanding roles for B.C.'s paramedics in the community.

Negotiations between the FBA and the Health Employers Association of BC (representing most publicly funded health employers) include a wide range of health care jobs in hospitals, care facilities, emergency health services, logistics and supply warehouses, and other shared services.

The current collective agreement expires March 31, 2014. The current round of bargaining began on January 14.

The Hospital Employees' Union represents about 85 per cent of health care workers covered by these talks. A further 14 per cent are represented by CUPE Local 873, the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union, and the International Union of Operating Engineers Local 882/882H.

Another seven unions represent less than one per cent of workers in the FBA, and are represented at the bargaining table by the Pulp, Paper and Woodworkers Local 5.

The bargaining unit includes care aides, ambulance paramedics, health records staff, lab and other diagnostic specialists, sterile supply techs, emergency dispatchers, nursing unit clerks, trades and maintenance workers, activity aides and rehab assistants, IT specialists, pharmacy techs, admitting and booking clerks, administrative staff, cleaning and dietary staff, and many others.

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