



BULLETIN

Convention 2012

June 1, 2012

The Report: June 2012 vol.33 num.2

DELEGATES ATTENDING HSAS 41ST ANNUAL CONVENTION rejected proposals to switch to a biennial convention, discussed the challenges of the current bargaining climate and debated solutions to a long-standing problem with a long-term disability trust just over 200 members.

-Every day you go to work to serve others, to make a difference," said President Reid Johnson during a report that touched on the HSAs drive to achieve fairness for patients by negotiating an agreement that delivers reasonable improvements for members. -Whether its a cancer patient, a woman in crisis, a child with developmental disabilities, a young man learning how to care for himself after a car accident; they are the reasons we go to work. You have chosen professions that matter."

Compassion for the people we serve begins with respect for the professionals who deliver these services, Johnson said.

-Respect for the work we do in our work lives. Respect for the people we serve every day, and respect for the work we do for our peers and our colleagues as HSA stewards and activists."

Johnsons report outlined ongoing advertising, direct lobbying of the government, and outreach to professional associations and educators as part of HSAs longterm goal of raising profile and clout for members, along with the addition of more specialized staff to deal with the growing complexity of labour relations and growing demand for member servicing. Johnson also announced that on top of additional labour relations expertise HSA is hiring additional staff to boost education, helping stewards develop the tools and skills to better serve members and represent HSA in communities.

-HSAs way of doing things is slightly different than other unions I have found. Its much more of a collaborative approach. Its not as much of a dictatorship or a get-out-thereand-make-a-scene kind of union."
MIKE TRELENBERG, Operations manager for Share Food Bank, Port Moody

-Its no secret that the systems we work in are under attack," said Johnson. -Not a day goes by that somewhere in the media public services, or the work of people delivering those public services, are criticised or under mined." HSA works to push back against these attacks through continued support of the BC Health Coalition and through affiliation with the BC Federation of Labour and the National Union of Public and General Employees.

-This convention has been kind of interesting. I have never really been pro-union. I think if nothing else just being able to talk to other people in each different sector is helpful. Were kind of educating each other here at the convention because we dont all know what the other profession does, so thats a big piece of the experience."
CRAIG CURTIS, pharmacist, Nanaimo

A number of chapters submitted resolutions proposing that HSA follow the lead of other major unions by holding conventions every second year, taking advantage of communications technologies to make sure members are better informed than ever while diverting resources into outreach strategies like regional conferences allowing more participation among members who cannot normally attend convention. The proposed changes, which would have required a two-thirds majority to pass, were defeated by delegates, many suggesting that convention plays an important role as a place for activists to exchange ideas and that many matters before convention simply cannot wait two years.

Delegates also heard a report on a long-term disability trust facing financial difficulties. The complexities of the problem, going back several decades, made for an emotional discussion. For more on this, see the story on page 19.

HSA played host to several guest speakers, including Jim Sinclair, President of the BC Federation of Labour, Amber Hockin, Regional Director for the Canadian Labour Congress and Larry Brown, Secretary-Treasurer for the National union of Public and General Employees. Adrian Dix, leader of the Opposition New Democrats and former health critic, delivered a keynote speech addressing his thoughts on potentially forming the next government of BC and managing the health care system to better serve patients while respecting health science professionals. For more about his speech, read the story on page 20.

-I just feel for our profession that representation in the union is not as strong as it should be. And in our little hospital there is sort of a family of people working there, its very friendly and easy going and not many people stand up for themselves in the union. But I think its very important for us to get involved because the union is doing a lot of great stuff for its members."
HOLLY ZHANG, ultrasound technologist, Vancouver

The 2012 David Bland Award was presented to registered psychiatric nurses Tasha Johnson and Tonia Cherris, on behalf of all registered psychiatric nurses at the Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit at Royal Jubilee Hospital.

-When the Vancouver Island Health Authority constructed a new patient care centre they were under the illusion that a new building would take care of the risk of violence in the new Psychiatric Intensive Care Unit," said Reid Johnson. -The employees knew otherwise. They knew that the unit was ill-conceived with respect to its layout, lack of safety protections, communications, and policies and procedures. They knew old unworkable processes were simply being moved to a new building."

Tasha Johnson spearheaded a letter-writing campaign to the health authoritys CEO, who responded by participating in a tour and agreeing to delay construction for nine months while concerns were addressed. As an HSA member who had never previously been involved in any mobilization Tasha Johnson became a spokesperson and the conscience of the initiative, while Tonia Cherris took on the unenviable task of holding the employers feet to fire when the predictable "quick fix or "hurry up attitude was presented. Tonias work ensured that the bureaucracy did not take over this project.

-Pharmacists feel supported by other disciplines here at convention and when the topic of the pharmacist wage rollback is brought up there is a really positive response to what we as pharmacists have done and how the HSA handled the issue."
RUBY SANGHA, pharmacist, Vancouver

Difficult choices for disability plan

One of the most difficult and emotional debates at this years Annual Convention revolved around a decision by HSAs union-trusted Long Term Disability Plan to transition members eligible for early retirement to the Municipal Pension Plan, and to reduce benefits paid to remaining claimants. While the decision was a difficult one, the Trustees felt it was the only option available to ensure the viability of the Plans, which had suffered from the financial meltdown in 2008, and exacerbated by a 2006 actuarial error.

HSA delegates to convention were asked to adopt an extraordinary resolution calling for the union to ask members if they would consider an increase in the amount of money members pay in union dues to maintain those members on current disability compensation levels. The motion was referred to the unions board of directors to consider the financial state of the union-trusted Long Term Disability plan that funds more than 200 members on long term disability, and the effect of a decision by plan trustees to remove members eligible for early retirement and to reduce benefits paid to remaining claimants.


Long-term disability (LTD) coverage is designed to provide a source of income should an employee become disabled outside of a work injury or illness. Notwithstanding the debate at convention and direction to the board to examine the issue, the changes to the plan will go into effect July 1, 2012.

The LTD plans in question are closed plans, which means that that no premiums are being paid into the plans. These plans were closed in 2006, when LTD coverage for HSA members moved from a union-run and 100 per cent member-funded plan, to a shared plan, with members paying 30 per cent of the premiums, and employers paying 70 per cent. A majority of HSA members are covered by the latter plan, which is not affected by the changes for the closed trusts.

Several members receiving LTD benefits under the closed plans made passionate presentations to convention delegates about the effect the changes to the LTD rules will have on them, and asked convention delegates to consider ways for the union to support them.

After some debate, the resolution was referred to the Board of Directors with direction to ensure members are educated about the issue. The Board of Directors is scheduled to consider the referred resolution at its next board meeting in June.

It is estimated that an immediate injection of approximately \$25 million may be required. The unions board of directors is expected to receive an analysis in June of the implications that would have on the amount of union dues paid by members.

-The tireless work and very long hours spent by these two courageous women on behalf their coworkers changed the way this employer did business," said Reid Johnson. -Without their efforts, this site would undoubtedly still be, as titled by WCB, the most dangerous in BC." 

-Coming here as a director, weve had to find ways to increase servicing, which means we need more staff, more labour relations officers. Our members want HSA to have a bigger profile in the province so that the public knows more who we are and what we do."

ANITA BARDAL, Director, Region 6, radiation technologist, Vancouver

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