January 3, 2014

OPEN LETTER TO CUPE HEALTH CARE MEMBERS:

Over these last 20 months, your bargaining committee has fought significant concessions tabled by the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations Inc. (SAHO) and the employers. After many months of hard bargaining between May 2012 and April 2013 we were successful in having many of these concessions either withdrawn or negotiated to where we believe they would be reasonable and workable in the administration of the collective agreement. Most monetary items were not discussed during this time as SAHO took the position that these should be deferred to the common table where all three provider unions (CUPE, SGEU and SEIU-West) typically negotiate wages and other proposals that represent the interests of health providers province-wide.

In April of 2013, CUPE believed we were in a position to join with the other provider unions at the common table to bargain monetary items and common proposals. The provider unions tabled a common package of proposals to SAHO during the week of September 9-13, 2013. We also met with SAHO on September 24-26, 2013.

Although the employers tabled no new language, each union was still faced with a concession that was specific to them. In CUPE’s case, the overtime “work for pay” proposal was still being advanced by SAHO even after many attempts to have it removed and our clear objections to its content and intent. We remain firm in our objection today.

Due to our frustration with the lack of progress at our respective SAHO tables, talks were initiated between the provider unions and the Ministry of Health. These were initially held in the summer of 2012 and were intended to be parallel to our ongoing negotiations with SAHO. These talks broke off in early fall of 2012 only to reconvene almost one year later at the Ministry’s request in July and August of 2013. In September 2013, the Ministry tabled an offer that was put to the provider unions for acceptance. This offer would move many times, however the offer that remained was the one we presented to you during our most recent bargaining tours. The package consisted of the following:

- A five year deal with wage increases of 2% in the first year (2012-2013), 1.5% in the second, 1.5% in the third, 1.55% in the fourth and 1.95% in the final year (2016-2017). This low wage offer does not consider the increased cost of living in a booming economy.
- An incremental increase to shift premium. Adjustments to other monetary items such as shift and weekend premiums do not close the gap between our premiums and those paid to RNs and other health professionals.
- A delayed increase to weekend premium (October 2015).
- An immediate increase to standby premium.
- A delayed increase to professional fees (April 2014). During the contract, professional fees would be reimbursed as of the rate on April 1, 2012. This means that you will pay more out of your own pocket if fees increase during the five year contract.
- A delayed increase to Transportation Allowance (April 2014).
- Acceptance of the work for pay concession.
- Acceptance of a partnership with the Ministry of Health. This contract offer is tied to a partnership agreement with the Ministry of Health and employers that would require the parties to work more collaboratively. Through the partnership, the Ministry and the employers hope to achieve more flexibility in the administration of the collective agreement during the five year contract.
- A recommendation from our bargaining committee for the acceptance of the above terms and conditions.

During October and November 2013, your CUPE bargaining committee held bargaining information sessions across the province to present the contract offer from the Ministry of Health. Thank you to the many members who attended these meetings to give your feedback. We heard loud and clear that you were disappointed and frustrated with that offer. You told us during these sessions that this offer was not good enough and that we needed to go back and get a better deal.
You shared your concerns about the current business cases being developed by 3sHealth regarding services CUPE members provide. The Ministry nor the employers’ offer includes no plan to address job change or job loss caused by any destabilizing influence of 3sHealth initiatives and possible privatization.

We take offense to the requirement that we must recommend a settlement that in good conscience we do not believe we can recommend. Following the tours CUPE did respond with other options to the Ministry for conclusion of a memorandum of agreement, including the possibility of mediation. These options were recently rejected by the Ministry of Health in a letter received December 19, 2013. With the parties unable to agree, the offer above has been withdrawn by the Ministry. Your bargaining committee has since sent SAHO a letter requesting for meeting dates for the months of February to April 2014.

SEIU-West and SGEU have since reached an agreement with the Ministry and its terms specific to each union. We understand they were required to agree to a concession and agree to recommend this package to their membership.

The work for pay proposal remains at the SAHO table. We remain firm that this is not the time for concessionary demands, that the language is unworkable and above all undermines your seniority rights in the workplace.

Throughout this process we have engaged in every opportunity presented in order to reach a fair collective agreement for you. This round of negotiations has presented some significant challenges and has been every bit about respect as it has been about what is on the table – and both are still sorely lacking.

To date we have not received a response from SAHO to our common package of proposals tabled in September of 2013. SAHO’s original offer tabled in May of 2012 remains its most current, which is a 2 year agreement with 1.25% and 1% for wage improvements respectively.

At this point, we believe a strike vote is necessary. We are clearly at the point now where we have exhausted all available avenues and need to show the employers, SAHO and the government that you are frustrated by the lack of meaningful respect and willingness to negotiate a fair deal.

Each Local has set meetings from January 8 – 22, 2014 for all members to attend where more information will be provided and to conduct a strike vote. Plans will also be in place for those who are unable to attend a meeting to receive information and cast their ballot in the strike vote. You can receive more information by calling your union office or by going to the CUPE Health Care Council website at www.cupesaskhcc.ca/.

A strong strike mandate will show the employers, SAHO and the government that CUPE members will not stand for second-rate treatment in the workplace.

A strong strike mandate will ensure that the presence of all our 13,000 members is felt at the bargaining table.

A strong strike mandate will verify that CUPE members are, as they always have been, standing firmly behind their bargaining committee.

Support your bargaining committee’s efforts to achieve a fair and equitable collective agreement on your behalf.

Vote “Yes” to take job action.

In Solidarity,

[Signature]

Gordon Campbell
CUPE Health Care Council President

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