

March 19, 2012

Today, we were advised by NSGEU that members of Local 42 (Healthcare) have voted in favour of strike action to support their bargaining demands. We respect the rights of our colleagues to take this position.

Conciliation dates

As the employer, we remain committed to the bargaining process and our primary focus is on the conciliation talks scheduled for April 3, 4 and 5. We are committed to working towards a settlement that is affordable for the taxpayers of Nova Scotia. For the sake of our patients and clients, it is our responsibility to work hard to avoid strike action. We expect the union to be equally as committed going into conciliation.

Emergency services

Capital Health takes the threat of a strike seriously. It is our duty to protect patients from harm and to minimize the potential effects on the safety of those who may need care at the time of a strike. That is why we have begun planning for a potential labour disruption. NSGEU has noted numerous times that there is an emergency services agreement in place, should it be needed. The most recent one was negotiated in 2006-2007. Generally speaking, the agreement would reduce staff for the Healthcare bargaining unit to approximately 20-30 per cent of normal staffing levels. This represents a significant reduction in service.

Since 2007, health care delivery has changed, our patients are sicker and their care needs are more complex. As well, the public, our patients and governments have all rightfully demanded that timely access to services be a priority. We have serious concerns with the staffing levels identified under the emergency services agreement and believe that a higher level of health care service is necessary during a strike. That is why we proposed "essential services" language as part of this round of bargaining. Unfortunately, NSGEU has rejected our proposal at the table.

It is important that everyone – the public, our patients and clients, and our staff – understand that in the event of a strike, using the current emergency services agreement would have a significant impact on services and our ability to maintain even those emergency services would be limited to days, not weeks.

Questions

Directors, managers and physician co-leaders will be meeting in the near future to work on the details of a strike contingency plan. Further updates will be shared with you once the details of the plan are finalized. In the meantime, if you have questions regarding contingency planning in your area, please speak with your director, manager or physician co-leaders.

Sincerely,

Kathy MacNeil
Vice President, People