



MEDIA RELEASE

SUN/SAHO Negotiations Stalled

REGINA, February 11, 2016: Today, the Saskatchewan Union of Nurses (SUN) notified the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations (SAHO) that collective bargaining has reached an impasse. This decision comes after more than seven (7) months at the bargaining table.

“We are incredibly disappointed and believe this to be a missed opportunity for SAHO to collaborate with the province’s almost 10,000 registered nurses on finding solutions to improving both patient care and workplaces,” says SUN President, Tracy Zambory. “A key item of concern is SAHO’s attempt to significantly restrict the ability of registered nurses to exercise their professional judgement to ensure safe staffing levels when critically needed.”

In current practice, registered nurses can often call in additional operational resources, including IT, maintenance, kitchen, or even snow removal staff when needed. However, only some registered nurses have a very limited ability to use their professional judgement to call in the additional nursing staff they deem necessary to provide safe patient care. SAHO’s proposal to restrict this even further places registered nurses in a compromising position from a professional standpoint, as it impedes their ability to address immediate and urgent patient care needs as well as exercise their responsibility to assess and coordinate care as defined by legislation.

“The language SUN is proposing reinforces the registered nurses’ professional responsibility to flag and deal with patient care issues in real-time – it’s definitely patient-centred,” says Zambory. “Every day, registered nurses are charged with the responsibility of having to make life-saving decisions about patients in this province, and their ability to independently determine whether staff levels are sufficient to provide the safest care possible at any given moment is a crucial element of safe patient care.”

SUN and SAHO entered into a new collaborative, solutions-based bargaining approach to meet the needs of patients, SUN members, and the employer. The shared focus was on finding solutions to improve the delivery of health care, develop quality workplaces, and put patient safety at the forefront.

“We truly believe that without the efforts of all parties focusing on the pressures facing healthcare and the need to ensure safe patient care, there may be serious consequences for the entire system,” Zambory said.

Talks have stalled because SAHO has backed away from addressing the priorities that the parties identified for both this round of bargaining and the tentative renewed Partnership Agreement with the Government and Regional Health Authorities. The shared priorities include

addressing employee engagement and workforce stability; reducing overtime and other avoidable costs to the system; and involving the largest provider group in collaborative approaches to improving the delivery of healthcare in the province.

“This province’s registered nurses are left wondering whether those advising SAHO were ever truly committed to the bargaining process,” says Zambory. “SUN entered into this solutions-based approach in good faith, recognizing that in today’s challenging fiscal climate, collaboration on shared issues is the best way to improve things for patients, registered nurses and the system.”

Saskatchewan’s registered nurses have been without a collective agreement for close to two years, with the previous agreement having expired on March 30, 2014. SUN and SAHO have been actively bargaining since July of 2015.

SUN represents 10,000 Registered Nurses (RNs), Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs), Registered Nurse(Nurse Practitioner)s (RN(NP)s) and graduates in the province.

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Backgrounder: SUN member email message, February 11, 2016, 11:25am

SUNBurst

SUN/SAHO NEGOTIATIONS STALLED: IT IS ABOUT RESPECT

[February 11, 2016] It is with great disappointment that the Negotiations Committee is advising the membership that this morning, SUN declared an impasse in bargaining with SAHO. This is a difficult situation for the Committee to find themselves in after seven (7) months of negotiations. The Committee has dedicated a lot of hard work to addressing membership priorities – professional practice, safe staffing levels, workload concerns, and innovative solutions to improve the delivery of healthcare.

After over a year of trying to get the Employer to recognize their obligation to bargain with us, in July 2015 the parties finally embarked on a new collaborative, solutions-based approach which would meet the needs of the patients, SUN members and the Employer. The parties were wholeheartedly in agreement that this round of negotiations was about the patients of this province and the delivery of safe patient care.

Finding Solutions Together

Over the past seven (7) months, the parties had made great progress in addressing common issues and concerns around patient safety, quality workplaces, professional practice and fiscal responsibility. SUN engaged in working groups and larger discussions around developing cost-saving and cost-neutral measures, system improvements, and efficiencies, in recognition of the fiscal constraints facing the Health Regions and the recent economic downturn in the province. Working collaboratively, the discussions were able to address the top priorities of our membership to ensure the ability to provide high-quality and safe patient care, while also addressing a number of the Employer's key concerns and needs.

What became apparent in early December is that SAHO was no longer committed to – or possibly even authorized to engage in this solutions-based process. This resulted in a surprising change in their approach to negotiations. We then found ourselves returning to a more traditional and adversarial style of bargaining.

Shifting Sands

This shift in SAHO's position negated the previous collaborative discussions aimed at providing the tools to address high staff turnover, workforce instability, wage-driven premiums, professional practice concerns (NAC/IAC), and safe patient care. The Committee entered into this new solutions-based approach with good faith in hopes of addressing our shared concerns; however, as things stand today, the Committee now believes that those advising SAHO were never truly committed to such a collaborative, solution-based process, nor do we believe they were fully committed to improving the delivery of healthcare for patients.

Respecting Your Essential Role

Our greatest concern with the shift in position, was their sudden unwillingness to meaningfully address improvements to professional practice/safe patient care after so many months of collaborative groundwork. The key area of concern in this regard is the Employer's refusal to recognize the Charge Nurse's responsibility to assess, coordinate care, and exercise their authority as defined by legislation.

Currently, the Charge Nurse has the ability to call in additional operational and non-nursing resources and staff – for example IT, maintenance, or kitchen staff – but those advising SAHO continue to challenge the ability of registered nurses to use their legislated responsibility, professional judgement and clinical knowledge to call in additional nursing staff when necessary to provide safe patient care.

We recognize that in some facilities and/or units this autonomy may already be informally or formally happening; but this is not the case everywhere – nor is this ability protected. Our goal is to ensure our legislated responsibilities and accountabilities are captured and further protected within the Collective Agreement.

This disregard for our professional judgement, assessment, accountability and standards is not in the best interest of patient care. The unwillingness to recognize the legislated authority of registered nurses hinders their ability to address immediate and urgent patient care needs. It also indicates a lack of respect for registered nurses' professional responsibility.

The Committee is frustrated, but remains committed to advocating for patient safety and our profession, and for improving the language within our Collective Agreement that

supports these priorities. Respecting the value registered nurses bring to system is essential to safe patient care.

The Committee would like to thank the membership for their continued support, feedback and encouragement during this stressful time. Your constant show of solidarity has provided us with the strength and determination to continue down this difficult and challenging path.

Stay Tuned

SUN Provincial is currently in the process of organizing membership meetings to provide members with greater detail and to seek their input and guidance as we determine next steps. Please keep an eye on your personal email, SUN's website and social media accounts for information and commentary as things progress.

In solidarity,

Your Negotiations Committee

Tracy Zambory - SUN President

Paul Kuling - Committee Chair & Second Vice-President

Susanne Cyr-Philipchuk - Community Based Facilities Representative

Roberta Jors - Mental Health Representative

Elaine Janzen - Integrated Facilities Representative

Janet Dziadyk - Saskatoon Base Hospitals Representative

Leeann Potetz-Moore - Public Health Representative

Lenore McMillan - Home Care Representative

Pamela Todd - Regina Base Hospitals Representative

Patricia Chubb - Regional Hospitals Representative

Warren Koch - Northern Representative

Yvonne Hotzak - Long Term Care Representative

The Committee is supported by:

Kelly Miner - Chief Negotiator & SUN Director, Labour Relations

Donna Ottenson - Employment Relations Officer

Colin Hein - Nurse Research and Practice Advisor

Touly Katsiris - Office Assistant

What does an impasse mean?

A declaration of an impasse occurs when one of the parties is no longer amending their position and no progress is being made.

Given the fact that SAHO has made no change in their position for the last few meetings and has, at times, attempted to amend language that the parties had previously agreed to, SUN has been left with no choice but to declare an impasse.

Under the new *Saskatchewan Employment Act*, the parties are required to enter into a conciliation period of up to 60 days in an attempt to resolve the outstanding issues. A conciliator or labour relations officer is assigned to assist the parties and determines when the period is up. Neither party is permitted to strike or lock-out during this period.

Once an impasse is declared and essential services have been identified, negotiations regarding essential services can occur at the same time as conciliation. SUN's goal through essential services will be to ensure the number of registered nurses identified as essential will be what is required/appropriate to provide safe patient care and meet patient needs.

SUN will continue to communicate pertinent information regarding essential services and the impasse through the appropriate channels.