

**News Conference Statement
Saskatchewan Health Sciences
Saskatoon
September 27, 2010**

Good afternoon and thank you for coming.

My name is Cathy Dickson, and I am the Acting President of **Saskatchewan Health Sciences**. Joining me today are a number of our members, including our union negotiating committee.

Saskatchewan Health Sciences is the union which represents more than three-thousand **specialized health care professionals**. Our members are from a wide variety of licensed health care professions including:

- Emergency care workers like Paramedics and EMTs;
- Acute care workers like Hospital Pharmacists, Perfusionists, and Respiratory Therapists;
- Rehab professionals like Physical Therapists and Speech Language Pathologists; and,
- Community-based professionals like Public Health Inspectors, Psychologists and Social Workers

Our union is the province-wide representative for more than **thirty** health care professions in all.

Our members are **specialized health care professionals** whose work cannot be performed by other health care providers - including doctors and nurses.

Like doctors and nurses, our professions face serious workplace challenges, including long waiting lists for our services and recruitment and retention issues.

In spite of these problems, our members have now been **more than a year** without a contract. Our previous contract expired March 31st, 2009.

In the past 18 months, health care employers, represented by SAHO, have dismissed virtually all of our proposals.

At the same time, health care employers have proposed a series of contract concessions that will only make waiting lists longer, and recruitment and retention more difficult.

In fact, more than a year into these negotiations, health care employers have yet to provide our members with a monetary offer.

Two years ago, the Government of Saskatchewan agreed to an unprecedented health care contract with registered nurses.

It defended that contract on the grounds of recruitment and retention issues, and the need to keep Saskatchewan competitive with other provinces, in the search for more nurses. The same arguments apply to the specialized health care professionals in the Health Sciences.

Perfusionists are the specialists who operate the heart-lung machines during heart surgery. Earlier this year, we revealed that a lack of Perfusionists was resulting in cancelled surgeries in Saskatoon.

In Regina, it is far too common to have no ambulances available to answer 9-1-1 calls, for up to half an hour, because our EMTs and Paramedics are not staffed to appropriate levels.

Foot Hills Hospital in Calgary has more Respiratory Therapists than the entire Province of Saskatchewan.

Patients are suffering and being put at risk by: inadequate staffing levels for many of our professions, and by Saskatchewan's inability to attract more of these specialized professionals from elsewhere.

Recruitment and retention has also become more difficult as other provinces, especially Alberta, have moved ahead of the wages and benefits offered here.

To my left is a display with a few examples of the **wage disparities** that have grown between Saskatchewan and Alberta. This display shows:

- That an Alberta *Pharmacist 2* earns a top wage of \$57.61 an Hour, while the equivalent position in Saskatchewan earns 17% less
- A *Speech Language Pathologist 1* in Alberta earns a top wage of \$48.48 an hour; the equivalent position in Saskatchewan earns 24% less
- The top wage for a *Physical Therapist 1* in Alberta is \$43.55 an hour, while the equivalent position in Saskatchewan earns 27% less
- And a *Cardiovascular Perfusionist 1* earns a top wage of \$51.03 an hour in Alberta. In Saskatchewan, the equivalent position earns 34% less

You get the picture. Alberta provides significantly higher wages and benefits to many of our specialized health care professions.

Saskatchewan cannot hope to compete for these specialized health care professionals unless that gap is narrowed.

To my right, you see a display that shows how our specialized professions have lost ground even within Saskatchewan in recent years.

Prior to the new nurses' contract two years ago the average wage for our professions was about 2.9% **less** than the wage for a registered nurse in Saskatchewan. Today that wage gap is 29% or **tenfold** what it was just two years ago.

In fact, to meet their professional licensing requirements **many** of our members require education and specialized training that goes beyond the level of education and training required by Saskatchewan's registered nurses.

If the Government, through SAHO, is serious about the recruitment and retention of our specialized health care professions, then this gap too will have to be narrowed by a wages and benefits offer that **approaches** what was approved for nurses two years ago.

Not taking action now will lead to more recruitment and retention problems long-term. Young people in Saskatchewan, seeing these huge wage differentials between nurses and other health care professionals, will be inclined to choose nursing over other health care professions.

Witness the long line-ups at SIAST in recent weeks to enroll for positions in the nursing program. It will be increasingly difficult to attract new entrants into other health care professions unless action is taken now.

We go back into health care negotiations with SAHO this week. Our members are not very optimistic about the state of these negotiations, but we are determined to see them through to a successful conclusion.

We will be making specific contract requests:

- To help **reduce waiting lists** for our critical health care services
- To improve the **recruitment and retention** of our specialized health care professionals, and
- To move our specialized professionals closer to the wages and benefits already earned by others, like registered nurses.

Saskatchewan people deserve health care that:

- Encourages specialized health care professionals to stay here in our Province
- That attracts top talent from elsewhere, and
- That makes the best use of the human resources we have now

The next round of contract negotiations will be a test of whether Saskatchewan health care employers are willing to give Saskatchewan people the kind of health care they want and deserve.

Thank you, we'd be pleased to answer your questions.