



Canadian Health Professionals Secretariat

Meeting Report

Ottawa

February 26-27, 2007

Participants

NSGEU/NUPGE

Michael Pronk
Lynette Johnson

AAHP

Patti O'Keefe
Sharon King

NBUPPE/NUPGE

Debbie Lacelle

OPSEU/NUPGE

Patty Rout
Michele Dawson Haber
Anthony Morabito

MAHCP

Wendy Despins
Lee Manning
Susin Cadman

HSAANUPGE

Elisabeth Ballermann
Lynette McAvoy
Jean-René Bérubé

NUPGE

Mike Luff
Louise Trépanier

NAPE/NUPGE

Gilbert Butt
Christina Kennedy

PEIUPSE/NUPGE

Carol McInnis

APTS

Dominique Verreault
Maria Piazza

MGEU/NUPGE

Lois Wales
Shelley Neel

HSAS

Chris Driol
Mary Spurr

HSABC/NUPGE

Cindy Stewart
Hans Brown
Lois Dick

Guest Speakers

Larry Brown, NUPGE National Secretary-Treasurer
Seth Klein, Director, BC Office, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

Welcome and Introductions

Meeting Date: February 26-27, 2007
Location: Vancouver, British Columbia

Co-Chairs Cindy Stewart and Mike Luff welcomed participants to the ninth meeting of the Secretariat. Luff passed on the regrets of James Clancy (NUPGE National President) and Carol Meyer (NUPGE Managing Director), who were unable to attend due to other very pressing business matters. The report of the previous meeting and the agenda for the current meeting were reviewed and approved.

CHPS Communications and Outreach Activities

Co-Chair Luff provided an overview of the issues that were dealt with as follow-ups to the last CHPS meeting. He also noted the diversity of issues covered by news releases from CHPS constituent organizations including: collective bargaining, public policy, advocacy campaigns, public relations and surveys. Constituents were reminded to send their communications material to Luff for posting on the CHPS website and direct distribution to other constituent organizations.

At the last CHPS meeting participants were given an overview of the cross-Canada “Medicare Works” campaign by David Robbins (Campaign Coordinator). Luff updated participants on the campaign and some specific outcomes. The campaign obtained excellent media coverage across the country, raising awareness about the value of public Medicare. Town Hall meetings were held in 32 communities in nine provinces. Over 50,000 copies of flyers were distributed and requests for more have been received. Thousands of fact sheets were also distributed at every Town Hall meeting. Luff also noted that the President-Elect of the Canadian Medical Association, Dr. Brian Day, had taken the time to arrange meetings with various sponsors to complain about the nature of the campaign.

Co-Chair Luff gave an overview of an upcoming national conference in Regina called *Tommy Douglas’ Vision for Medicare, S.O.S. Medicare 2: Looking Forward*. Tackling the challenges to and within Canada's publicly funded system will be the focus of the conference. Luff emphasized the importance of representation from health science professionals at the conference and encouraged CHPS constituents to attend. He also noted that the National Union is a principal sponsor of the conference and worked hard to ensure that Elisabeth Ballermann, president of HSAA/NUPGE, would be speaking on a panel, thus ensuring official recognition of the role of health science professionals in Canada’s public health care system. Other speakers include: Dr. Arnold Relman of Harvard Medical School; Monique Bégin, former minister of health in the Trudeau government; Tom Kent, principal secretary to Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson; Alan Blakeney, former Saskatchewan premier; and Roy Romanow, former Saskatchewan premier and chair of the Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada.

Constituent Reports

The 12 reports focused on government climate, collective bargaining, strikes, campaigns, staffing, significant grievance decisions and other major developments. Copies of the reports were included in the meeting binders and are available by contacting Co-Chair Luff.

Co-Chair Stewart facilitated a discussion during which each union reviewed the highlights of their reports and answered questions. The participants were able to share strategies and information on key developments, challenges and concerns across the country. Many organizations are either facing or are in the aftermath of provincial elections, and are dealing with collective bargaining strategies accordingly. Media and coalition campaigns as a means of raising the profile of health professionals are still very popular amongst the CHPS constituents.

Participants also provided a breakdown of membership numbers according to full-time, part-time and casual employees. There was also a good discussion about Collective Agreement provisions regarding maternity leave top-up. It was agreed that at the next meeting it would be useful to discuss issues related to pensions, including funding, administration and public policy areas.

Presentation: Larry Brown, NUPGE National Secretary-Treasurer *Trade Deals and health science professionals*

NUPGE National Secretary-Treasurer Larry Brown gave an overview of four trade deals on the immediate policy horizon: (a) the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS); (b) the North American Security and Prosperity Partnership (SPP); (c) the BC-Alberta Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA); and (d) Atlantica, a proposed new Canada-US export zone.

He outlined the potential impact of these trade deals on public health care and health science professionals in terms of privatizing public services, deregulation and creating a disposable workforce.

Brown emphasized the need for unions to continue to work with allies in other progressive organizations in Canada and internationally to fight against these specific trade deals and the corporate globalization agenda.

He said the National Union remains committed to closely monitoring these trade deals and assessing their impact on our economy, workers' rights and democracy. The National Union will also work with CHPS constituent organizations to identify and expose threats in these trade deals for health science professionals.

Guest Speaker: Seth Klein, Director, BC Office, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
The Sustainability of the Health Care System

One argument most Canadians have heard in recent years is that Canada's public health care system is unsustainable because our population is aging and seniors use a disproportionate amount of health care services. Klein's presentation exposed how there is more drama than truth in this argument.

Klein presented compelling facts and arguments which provide a better understanding of the real cost pressures in the public health care system and what they mean for the future in terms of sustainability. Population aging, in and of itself, is but a small contributor to rising cost pressures in the public health care system. In fact, based on current projections there is little to suggest a demographic time-bomb about to go off.

Instead, the real challenge for financing the health care system is advances in technological possibilities, broadly defined to include pharmaceutical drugs, new surgical techniques, new diagnostic and imaging technologies, and end-of-life care.

Klein argued that these challenges can be addressed most efficiently and equitably in the context of a public system. He noted that governments in Ontario, Alberta, BC and Quebec have led the charge to convince Canadians that we can't afford public health care. Yet each of these governments have drastically cut taxes in their provinces, in such a way that the wealthy have received a huge tax break while the average taxpayer gets a very modest tax cut. So when these governments say they can't afford public medicare, they really mean they've chosen to give the wealthy a major tax cut rather than use those taxes for health care.

According to Klein, what matters is the size of health care expenditures relative to our total income (or GDP) – not the share of a particular provincial budget, as various premiers and health ministers have argued. And the good news is that as a percentage of GDP, health care spending in Canada has barely grown over the last 15 years and in some years it actually decreased.

In other words, the crisis in public health care isn't about financial sustainability. It's a crisis of political leadership and courage. The real choice is how do we want to pay for our health care? Collectively through a progressive tax system? Or individually out of our own pockets? The economically smart choice, and the morally correct choice, is to continue pooling our money (and risk) through our public health care system.

National Union Report

Co-Chairs Stewart and Luff presented an overview of recent public sector labour relations developments across the country. Luff described several public policy campaigns which NUPGE is working on in the areas of health care, labour rights,

climate change and pensions. He noted that the following new NUPGE publications have been or will be soon released:

- *Keeping Our Cool: A Climate Change Primer*
- *Dignity Denied: Long-Term Care and Canada's Seniors*
- *It's Time for a National Home Care Program*
- *Pensions Background Series*
- *Denied Opportunity: A Review of Canada's Temporary Foreign Workers Program*

These publications are available by contacting Co-Chair Luff at mluff@nupge.ca Co-Chairs Stewart and Luff also provided a brief overview of an upcoming NUPGE conference focused on the community-based social services sector. Stewart also noted that preparation for the National Union's Triennial convention are underway and that invitations for delegates and observers will be sent out soon.

Pandemic Planning

Co-chair Stewart reviewed the CHPS background paper called *Pandemic Planning in Canada*. It deals with the real concerns of whether the response of governments to a pandemic threat will be effective. It also provides information about the federal government's strategy for the distribution of vaccines and antiviral drugs.

She also gave an overview of a new CHPS publication called *Pandemic Influenza Planning Checklist*. The publication is intended to help science professionals and their health and safety representatives assess and improve current pandemic planning efforts at their workplace.

Stewart also reviewed a draft letter to provincial premiers and encouraged CHPS participants to ensure the letter is signed and sent by the union president. The letter requests information on the preparedness of critical infrastructure and supplies, such as the N95 respirator.

Co-Chair Luff provided an overview of a recent meeting related to pandemic planning which NUPGE and CHPS representatives attended in Toronto. The meeting was called a *Scientific working meeting on occupational influenza prevention and control in a health care setting*. The NUPGE and CHPS representatives advocated at the meeting that should there be an outbreak of any virus, such as H5N1 influenza, all front line health care workers should be protected using a fit-tested NIOSH certified N95 respirator/mask which is designed to protect against 95% of airborne particulates.

Luff also briefed participants on a recent Public Health Agency of Canada meeting held on January 16, 2007 to discuss the possible use of antiviral medications as a preventative measure in case of an influenza pandemic outbreak.

Copies of the publications and reports of the meetings are available by contacting Co-Chair Luff at mluff@nupge.ca

Final Report of the SARS Commission

The outbreak of SARS in Canada in 2003 took the lives of 44 Canadians, including some health professionals. Many more people and health care workers were infected. NUPGE and its Components, working with other unions and community groups, immediately stepped up efforts to pressure governments to strengthen capacities to protect the health and safety of workers and all Canadians.

We also pushed the Ontario government to establish a commission of inquiry into how the system failed to protect workers and patients during the SARS crisis. An official inquiry was established and it released its final report in January 2007.

Patty Rout (OPSEU/NUPGE) gave a brief overview of Justice Campbell's final report on SARS. Justice Campbell's report highlighted the lack of preparedness, infection control and worker safety systems in the province. The report didn't blame anyone specifically, but it did identify several systemic problems within hospitals, health departments, and other government agencies that hampered the province's ability to respond to the crisis effectively. Importantly, the concerns expressed by front-line health care workers and their unions are given some prominence in the report.

In fact, Rout explained, a quick glance through the final report gives you a sense that Justice Campbell concluded that the outbreak was contained eventually only through the determination and sacrifice of the workers in the health care system at the time. He also recognizes that many of these workers continue to face the psycho-social effects of their experience with SARS.

Rout also highlighted the report's essential recommendation that the precautionary principle (the principle that health workers should always err on the side of caution in the absence of scientific evidence), should be enshrined in the provincial Occupational Health and Safety Act and other relevant legislation.

Follow Ups

Issue	NUPGE/CHPS Responsibility	Constituent Union Responsibility	Task Completed
Report of the meeting	Draft and circulate		✓
Contact sheet	Update and circulate		✓
HSABC arbitration award and LRB decision on language fluency requirement	Collect and circulate	HSABC to send to Mike Luff	✓

Issue	NUPGE/CHPS Responsibility	Constituent Union Responsibility	Task Completed
HSABC Sonographer report by ergonomics expert Judy Village	Collect and circulate	HSABC to forward to Mike Luff	✓
SOS Medicare conference, May 3-4, 2007 in Regina	Mike Luff will arrange a caucus meeting for NUPGE and CHPS representatives	Send names and contact information of delegates to Mike Luff	✓
New Brunswick Union Membership Website e-mail data base	Collect and circulate information	Debbie Lacelle to provide Mike Luff with information	✓
OPSEU Collective Agreement	Collect and circulate		✓
Invitations to solidarity guests for NUPGE convention			✓
CAOT Publication on human resources data collection	Collect and distribute		✓
OPSEU report on Sonographer ergonomics study	Collect and circulate	OPSEU will send information to Mike Luff	
APTS harassment policies and procedures e.g. member-on-member harassment	Collect and circulate	APTS to forward policy to Mike Luff	