

Healthcare Is Not Just An Employer Issue

The purpose of this correspondence is to bring awareness to some of the significant issues (consultation, lack of respect, and adherence to our current collective agreements) the “Unions” (Prince Edward Island Nurse Union -PEINU, Prince Edward Island Union of Public Sector Employees-UPSE, International Union of Operating Engineers Local 942 -IUOE, and Canadian Union of Public Sector Employees Locals 805,1051,1778,1779 – CUPE) are experiencing with Health PEI and Department of Health and Wellness “the Employer”.

Over the past couple of years, there has been a significant deterioration and frustration with labour and government relations. We are frustrated with the meetings with the Employer which appear to be only “lip service” and “check box meetings”. Most often, agenda items for the standing meetings with Health PEI are from the unions, based on information we have obtained from our members about violations of the current collective agreements or initiatives from the Employer which we were never consulted. The information obtained from these meetings appears to be misconstrued to what is happening on the front line and our members are frustrated with the misrepresentation by the Employer to the public.

One of the most significant issues is the lack of consultation from the Employer. The Employer lacks the understanding and concept of consultation. In review of a project or an initiative the Employer is seeking to establish, or a deviation from established practice or collective agreement provision, they will come to meetings with an already approved initiative, approved by either their Executive Leadership Team, Board of Directors, or Treasury Board, and then say they want to consult. This is not consultation. This is an information session that does not allow Unions the opportunity to provide input and identify concerns or impacts the project or initiative may have on their membership. This uninformed unilateral decision-making has caused significant morale and culture issues across many of the healthcare sites, an exodus of staff from Health PEI, and divisiveness among unions and other classification groups. During the COVID-19 pandemic, which was the most significant global health crisis in the past 100 years, there was meaningful consultation from the Employer and full transparency. The unions had the opportunity to provide input and feedback for new policies, protocols, and procedures before any initiative was finalized and we signed numerous Memorandum of Agreements (MOA's) which benefited both parties. There were minimal grievances, if any, and the labour

relationship was strong. If there were disagreements, we were able to resolve the disputes amicably or respectfully agreed to disagree.

The second most significant issue is the lack of respect for our current collective agreements and past practice. Health PEI has demonstrated a significant deviation from established past practice and interpretations that have been accepted by the parties for years. These are mature agreements with a lot of history. It has been identified from one union that they are filing new grievances weekly, as the Employer has chosen to blatantly, and knowingly violate the current collective agreement. This has eroded the relationship between the Unions and the Employer and subsequently damaged the Unions creditability and trust of our membership as we try to rectify these violations through the grievance and arbitration process. Unfortunately, the Employer is not timely in responding, if at all, which has made it even more challenging to get the violations of the collective agreement rectified.

In summary, the Unions feel frustrated with the insincere check box meetings, lack of consultation and transparency, unilateral decision-making, uninformed trial projects, business model perspective, and lack of respect from the Employer. This has resulted in an increase in labour activity, unions feeling discredited by the membership, and apathy to continue to meet on issues that have already been decided by the Employer. We, the Unions, are requesting to be consulted and involved from the onset and not be presented with "the box already built" approach on issues that affect our membership, to be recognized as a key stakeholder with subject matter experts to assist in developing solutions, to be respected as an advocate for our members, to partner in addressing the health crisis, and for the employer to respect and adhere to our bargained collective agreements.



Barbara Brookins, President of Prince Edward Island Nurses Union



Karen Jackson, President of Union of Public Sector Employees



Tracey Robertson, President of International Union of Operating Engineers

Chris Lewis

Chris Lewis, President Local 1778 – Canadian Union of Public Employees

Cindy Ramsay

Cindy Ramsay, Local 1779 - Canadian Union of Public Employees

Robyn Currie

Robyn Currie, President Local 1051 – Canadian Union of Public Employees

Bobby Kennedy

Bobby Kennedy, President Local 805 – Canadian Union of Public Employees