



To: Bargaining Unit Presidents, Hospital Sector

From: Alan Warrington, RN, Chair, Hospital Central Negotiating Team

Date: April 22, 2021

Re: **Hospital Central Negotiating Team (HCNT) Update**

C: Board of Directors, Local Coordinators, HCNT, Staff

ONA and the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) concluded their interest arbitration hearing before Arbitrator Eli Gedalof and nominees Kate Hughes (ONA) and Brian O'Byrne (OHA), on Wednesday, April 21, 2021, via Zoom video conference. The OHA made it clear that, even with the assistance of Arbitrator Gedalof, they have no interest in settling a collective agreement that provides job security for ONA members.

Without a doubt, job security, manageable workloads and the impact of Bill 124, *Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019*, on compensation, were the most contentious issues. During our arbitration hearing and in mediation, we maintained that the continuing introduction of inappropriate skill-mix changes, unfilled full-time vacancies, and the overreliance on part time and excessive workloads are making it extremely difficult for us to provide safe, quality patient care.

ONA presented the "demonstrated need" for contract language to provide protection against the erosion of RN jobs, and a minimum standard of full-time to part-time ratio to ensure our members can take their vacation while allowing for quality patient care. We produced sample contract language from other provincial nursing contracts that maintains current RN staffing levels and preserves quality patient care. Ontario residents and RNs deserve the same.

ONA also went forward to arbitration seeking normative compensation improvements, including wage increases, premium, and benefit improvements. ONA's compensation proposals focused on the negative impact of gender inequality on ONA members that is further perpetuated by the impact of Bill 124.

We proposed to ensure nurse practitioners (NPs) have approximately 80 per cent of their time dedicated to clinical activities, and approximately 20 per cent to non-clinical care responsibilities, including professional development (e.g., research, education, leadership, policy and procedure development, education material development, and administrative duties), access to university provided stipends for student supervision, recognition of prior RN experience and a single provincial wage grid.

We also went forward with a number of health and safety proposals, including language to improve access and supply of personal protective equipment (PPE) and salary continuance when members are required to self-isolate.

The OHA continues to seek contract changes that would provide hospitals with flexibility to move RNs as they deem fit through reassignment, elimination of some of the protections and options that the current seniority provisions provide to our members. The OHA further proposed contract changes that would minimize the retirement packages to those senior members where there are layoffs. The hospitals also want the opportunity to eliminate more full-time positions, all the while creating more part-time jobs. These proposals all focus on balancing their budgets versus delivering safe, quality patient care.

At the hearing, ONA argued against the principles of Bill 124, which limits total compensation increases to one per cent per year. We argued that because ONA has filed a Charter Challenge, requested government exemption from Bill 124, and given that Premier Ford said on March 30, 2020 and continues to say that nurses are worth so much more than one per cent, our members should have a proper general wage increase. Such an increase should at least match gains we made for RNs in our nursing homes and Local Health Integrated Network (LHIN) sectors, and as enjoyed by male-dominated professionals in Ontario, such as police and fire services, which would keep pace with escalating inflation.

The OHA has taken the position that we should follow Bill 124 without regard to any other wage increases for other hospital workers. The OHA advised the Arbitration Board that every other union member in the hospital would be subject to the three-year moderation period in the future. ONA suggested that if the Conservatives are not re-elected, this might not be true.

After two days of arbitration (April 20-21), we now await the Arbitration Board's decision. We expect to receive the final and binding award from the Board in approximately 30 days. We are hoping for a favourable result, but there are no guarantees, and the Arbitrator will take Bill 124 into account.

In the interim, we will be planning our Hospital Sector meeting to be held via Zoom, after the award is released. Our members' safety continues to be our highest priority.

If you have any questions for the HCNT, please send them to ONA President Vicki McKenna at vickim@ona.org. Vicki will see they are brought to my attention.