



# MEDIA RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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## "EMERGENCY RETENTION AND RECRUITMENT PARTNERSHIP KEY TO NURSES' SETTLEMENT" - SUN

**<<REGINA>>** The Saskatchewan Union of Nurses (SUN) surprised negotiators for the Saskatchewan Association of Health Organizations (SAHO) today when they asked SAHO to commit to a collaborative "Emergency Retention and Recruitment Partnership" rather than tabling a traditional proposal package for a new collective agreement.

SUN told SAHO negotiators today that the collaborative partnership is urgently required to head off a mass exodus of registered nurses who intend to resign, retire or revert to casual in order to avoid the punishing overtime and workload stress caused by the current 10% vacancy rate.

SUN advised SAHO negotiators that if nurses act on their stated intentions, the province will lose another 2,600 nurses over the next three years, in addition to the current shortfall of 1,000 positions. (In 2005 there were 300 RN/RPN vacancies, in 2006 there were 599 vacancies, and for 2007/08 there are 793, plus another 213 positions health regions abolished or are filling with other health providers). SUN said that would cut the current workforce in half, force widespread facility and bed closures, and cripple the health care system.

SUN's presentation to SAHO also claimed that Regional Health Authorities (RHAs) are improperly diverting nursing budgets from patient care, since they received \$45 million in funding last year for the 793 vacant positions, spent \$25 million of that on overtime, and reallocated the rest to balance RHA budgets, or invest in capital equipment. SUN claims that one RHA used funds from nursing vacancies to fund 19% salary increases for the CEO and Vice-Presidents.

According to SUN President Rosalee Longmoore, *"If we expect to meet the targets government has set, namely increasing the number of nurses by 800 over the next three years, we can't stand another round of traditional adversarial bargaining. We need a genuine retention and recruitment partnership with regional health authorities, and we need to act now to provide immediate relief to nurses, so nurses don't have to continue to work this punishing overtime."*

SUN's "Emergency Recruitment and Retention Partnership" calls for:

**Immediate Relief from Excessive Overtime:** RHAs must provide immediate relief for nurses working excessive overtime by temporarily reducing admissions and services to match available staffing, and advising nurses that overtime is voluntary.

**Meeting Professional Standards to Achieve Patient/Client Safety:** RHAs must accept that nurses are bound by legislation and professional standards to assess and protect patient safety, including nurses' obligation to request that management either provide sufficient staffing, halt further admissions, close beds, or transfer patients to a safe care area.

**Maintaining Minimum Staffing to Improve Patient/Client Safety:** In order to stabilize the current nursing workforce, improve public access to services and improve patient safety, RHAs shall maintain as a minimum baseline the number of full time equivalent RNs and RPNs (including current vacancies) employed by each RHA as of November 1, 2007. Permanent relief positions will be created to cover vacations and other absences.

**Improved Nurse Patient Ratios and Patient Safety:** Establishment of formal nurse/patient ratios for each unit/facility/agency that recognizes nurses' professional obligation to assess patient needs, and provides a mechanism to match RN/RPN staffing with shifting patient needs and workload, including the right of nurses to authorize the transfer of patients and/or close beds, refuse further admissions, or otherwise reduce services where patient safety is jeopardized.

**Retention and Recruitment Joint Funds/Incentives:** To ensure nursing budgets are reserved for front line care and retention and recruitment, and to provide an incentive for RHAs to achieve the targets established by government, each RHA will contribute funding that will equal the salary and benefit costs for each vacant position to a joint SUN/RHA retention and recruitment fund, utilized to fund innovative regional initiatives to fill vacancies and retain nurses.

**Retention and Recruitment Targets:** RHAs will increase baseline staffing by 320 nurses by April 1, 2009, 320 by April 1, 2010 and 160 by April 1, 2011.

**Retention Initiatives for New, Mid and Late Career Nurses.**

- Provincial Service Recognition
- Long Service Recognition
- Enhanced Professional Development and Continuing Education

**Expanded Health Promotion and Prevention Initiatives:** Expansion of care coordination, health promotion and prevention activities will reduce admissions, readmissions and pressure on emergency departments and acute care beds. Reduced hours of work for RNs/RPNs eligible for early retirement to permit them to focus on coordinating care, patient teaching, clinical education, mentorship, or health promotion and prevention initiatives developed by the health region. Creation of full time health promotion and prevention positions whose role will include patient safety and health promotion initiatives, medication compliance, critical incident reduction, chronic disease management, fitness, smoking, and weight reduction programs.

**Creation of new Nurse Practitioner positions:** Each RHA shall create and maintain new Nurse Practitioner positions within the region so that licensed Registered Nurse (NPs) can obtain employment and be utilized to provide health services to communities without sufficient physician services, and reduce pressure on acute and long-term care facilities.

**Supernumerary Positions for New Graduates**

RHAs will post 300 new supernumerary positions for new graduates annually, who will be offered orientation, continuing education opportunities, and formal mentorship by an experienced nurse.

**Enhanced Salaries and Benefits**

In order to achieve retention and recruitment targets set by government, RHAs must offer competitive salaries, benefits, and innovative retention and recruitment initiatives that allow Saskatchewan to compete effectively with provinces that attract Saskatchewan nurses. Accordingly, effective April 1, 2008, and each April 1st thereafter, salaries and premiums will be adjusted by an amount that would provide Saskatchewan nurses with salaries and premiums equal to the salaries and premiums in effect in Alberta less the difference in cost of living between the provinces.

***See the main page of SUN's website at [www.sun-nurses.sk.ca](http://www.sun-nurses.sk.ca) for SUN's "Condition Critical" presentation to SAHO and the "Emergency Retention and Recruitment Initiatives" proposal for more information.***

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