
Public Statement by Barbara Brookins, President of the PEI Nurses' Union**November 22, 2023**

In response to the discussions held in the PEI Legislative Assembly on November 21, 2023, regarding the Nursing Recruitment Incentive Program, and additional comments made by the Minister on *CBC Island Morning* that aired on November 22, 2023, the PEI Nurses' Union wishes to address these matters.

The PEI Nurses' Union is concerned about the misleading information provided by the Minister of Health and Wellness, Hon. M. McLane, and the delayed distribution of recruitment incentives to newly hired nurses at Health PEI.

The delays in payments of the Recruitment Incentives that were offered to new hires were not caused or related to the collective bargaining process.

Recruitment Incentives & Return-In-Service Agreements

A recruitment incentive is a vital and critical tool currently being used to recruit new nurses to help stabilize the staffing in our healthcare system. A Return-In-Service (RIS) Agreement is put in place by the employer to outline the commitments made by a new employee who will receive the recruitment incentive.

The current RIS Agreements provides a \$13,000-\$16,000 incentive, depending on which Health PEI worksite the recruit will be employed, and this included a Return in Service for a 2-year full-time commitment.

The Nurses' Union has been consulting with Health PEI since August 2023 to address the terms of the new RIS Agreements. As the details were being finalized, the Nurses' Union became aware of verbal commitments made during the recruitment process that did not align with the terms of the previous (2022) or newly drafted (2023) RIS Agreements. Offers were extended to provide the full incentives to individuals who were hired to work Part-Time or Casual.

The Minister and his department are responsible for recruitment. The Nurses' Union and has been working with Health PEI to clean up the mess created by government that has negatively impacted our new members. These recruitment incentives are some of the highest in dollar value in the country and it is necessary to ensure that they are being issued with fairness and accuracy. For the Minister to put pressure on Health PEI to pay these out without our new members knowing what they are signing is unfair and not fiscally responsible.

While recruitment incentives are important, we must not lose sight of the larger picture. The healthcare system in PEI, especially in rural areas, requires sustainable, long-term strategies to address the chronic staffing shortages.

We advocate for policies and actions that not only attract new talent but also retain and support our existing healthcare workforce. Recruitment incentives must address the needs of the system.

Clarification on the Union's Role & Relationship with Government/Health PEI

Minister McLane's comment that he instructed the Nurses' Union to "fix this darn problem" is not only untrue, but misleading to the public – and the new Nurses who have been directly affected – about the root cause of this issue. The Minister has not contacted the Nurses' Union to discuss this directly.

The PEI Nurses' Union does not take instruction from the Minister; we answer to our members – the 1400+ Registered Nurses & Nurse Practitioners who work at Health PEI. The tone and implication of the Minister's comments are deeply concerning and undermine the collaborative and respectful relationship that should exist between the government, Health PEI, and the Union.

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