



**A BRIEF TO THE GREY BRUCE
BOARD OF HEALTH
RESPECTING COMPENSATION LEVELS
FOR
PROGRAM ASSISTANTS IN
PUBLIC HEALTH UNITS IN
ONTARIO**

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FORWARD

Labour contract negotiations are to be conducted by both parties acting in good faith on behalf of their principals. When the OPSEU bargaining team was told, formally across the bargaining table, that the employer's intent was to pay them "...in the middle..." of the wages paid in health units in Ontario, we provided a sampling that showed that we will need to do some "catching up" to get back into the middle of the pack. The employer responded by showing us some numbers from other health units that did not jibe with ours. We did some more research and went back to the table and showed the employer that their numbers were wrong. We provided accurate data from direct contact with other health units. That evidence was rejected and the concept of comparing locally was introduced by the employer. We did some more research and showed that local public service positions with similar duties, responsibilities and skills, including education, are paid at a significantly higher rate than GBHU PA's.

The current impasse can be resolved if the employer follows through on its stated intention to compensate the members of this bargaining unit "...at or slightly above the provincial average."

To not carry through with the commitment made at the bargaining table would be to not be bargaining in good faith toward concluding a collective agreement for this group.

The Union is counting on the members of the Grey Bruce Board of Health to ensure that good faith is paramount in the conduct of business between the GBHU and OPSEU on behalf of its members.

"...you should be happy to make \$10,000.00 less than what is paid in Toronto..."

County of Grey Warden Bob Pringle – May 29, 2008
Vice-Chair Grey Bruce Board of Health

Toronto Public Health -	\$53,453.00
	<u>\$10,000.00</u>
	\$43,453.00
Grey Bruce PHU	\$35,836.00

INTRODUCTION

The current labour dispute at the Grey Bruce Health Unit (GBHU) needs little introduction. As sitting members of the Board of Health (BOH) you have each taken a particular interest in the operation of the GBHU during your term. Your commitment to public health and dedication to public service are appreciated.

This brief is intended to inform the BOH with respect to the issues underlying the impasse at which the parties have arrived in their attempts to negotiate a renewal of the collective agreement between the GBHU and OPSEU on behalf of its Local 276 – Office and Clerical bargaining unit. Our purpose is to convince the Board members to consider increasing the compensation adjustments that the BOH negotiating team can offer at the bargaining table, thus potentially ending the dispute.

There has been a dispute between the parties as to the accuracy of information provided at the bargaining table and therefore the accuracy of the information that has been provided to the BOH has been called into question. The Union and its members have researched the material used in bargaining and presented here by accessing the Collective Bargaining Information Service (CBIS) of the Ministry of Labour, by direct contact with the health units involved and/or with the other public service employers cited. We trust that there is no question as to the veracity of the information contained herein. In the event that there are any questions or concerns please feel free to contact the author, Ted Loughhead, at the OPSEU Owen Sound Regional Office at (519) 371-4817.

We have also included Position Descriptions for Program Assistants at GBHU and at other health units to show that we are, in fact, comparing “apples to apples”.

Finally, the Union in no way wishes to personalize this dispute. Facts are reported and if there are names and positions attached to those facts then they are put forward only as part of the reportage.

HISTORY

The previous Office and Clerical (O&C) collective agreement at GBHU expired on October 31, 2007 (**tab #6**). The parties began negotiations for the renewal of the collective agreement on October 30 and continued talks on November 7, 2007, January 31, 2008 and April 9, 24 and 30, 2008, a total of 6 days of negotiations. The last 4 days were conducted with the assistance of a conciliation officer from the Ministry of Labour.

At the outset of negotiations the employer team indicated that there was a limited amount of money available for increases and that it is the policy of the BOH to approve increases that would keep health unit employees in "...the middle of the pack or slightly above the middle..." We have relied on that sentiment throughout these negotiations. The Union then created a document that was provided to the employer in bargaining (**tab #7**) showing the wages provided at various health units similar in size to GBHU. In subsequent passes at the bargaining table there were many items agreed between the parties which have been signed off (**tab #8 – as a list only**) and which are now off the table. There have been many items from both sides withdrawn that are also off the table. During these discussions the employer indicated that it was their intent to not compare the PA's at GBHU solely to PA's at other health units but to office and clerical employees at various local public service agencies. The Union responded by creating a document (**tab #9**) showing the wages paid at both other public health units and at local public service agencies. This comparison to other agencies is what introduces the question of comparing "apples to oranges". When comparing only to other health units, the jobs being compared are substantially identical to each other. A PA at any other health unit, no matter the title given by that health unit, is still doing substantially the same work as the PA's at the GBHU. Job Descriptions are provided for comparison at **tab #10**. The job descriptions of the comparator positions at other local public service agencies are not easily obtained and are not provided herein. In order to make the comparison to those positions as accurate as possible we relied on information received from either the workers in those positions or human resources professionals at the subject

agency. We were, however, able to include some relevant job postings. **tab #11**

All of the information provided so far by the Union has been, in each instance, called into question by the health unit bargaining team. Justification for the health unit's position respecting wage information was provided in the form of wage data that was obtained from the ALPHa website. The problem is that the ALPHa website is maintained by this not-for-profit organization; the wages are not kept current and there are inaccuracies in the posted data (**tab #12**). Further, the document that the employer proffered in bargaining has the placement of GBHU on the chart approximately in the middle of the group (highlighted). This placement and highlighting give the impression that the PA's wages at GBHU are close to the middle of the listed group. Closer examination reveals that there are several agencies physically listed below GBHU that should be listed above GBHU if sorted "min/max". This creates an erroneous impression and is thus misleading.

Still considering **tab #12**, the average from the listed data, provided by the employer team, is \$39,200. The current GBHU rate for PA's is currently \$35,836, a difference of almost 10% on the employer's own data.

Further, please note the end dates of the contracts listed in this document. The end date shown for GBHU is accurate, therefore, if the other end dates are also accurate, the average wage at these representative health units would need to be increased to meet the 2008 comparison criteria.

Finally, when the "actual" wages from accurate data are averaged the wage disparity is even greater. **tab #13**

COMPARING APPLES TO APPLES

The question of which health unit should be used when comparing compensation levels for Program Assistants at GBHU has been raised in bargaining by the employer team. The question is easily answered by looking at the job descriptions of Program Assistants or Program Administrative Assistants or whatever nomenclature is used

by the subject health unit; they all do the same style of work in the programs they support at the health unit in which they are employed, therefore Program Assistants can be compared to Program Assistants anywhere in the province. **See tab #10**

Even if there is a need to look at compensation levels geographically (locally) rather than by job description, local public service agencies with similar positions that have similar duties and responsibilities clearly show that the PA's at GBHU are substantially underpaid. **See tab #9.**

The employer team introduced the concept of comparing your PA's to local agencies, therefore if there is any difficulty in comparing in this manner, the employer will either have to abandon that tack or will have to recognize that these numbers also show how far out of whack your PA's wages are.

THE EMPLOYER'S NUMBERS

The document at **tab #12** was presented to the Union at the bargaining table to show that the GBHU is "...in the middle of the pack..." The GBHU row is highlighted and it looks as though GBHU is, in fact close to the middle. When data is collected, analysed and used in contract negotiations the norm is to use only one set of figures, the "job rate" (top rate), of the position(s) being considered. The employer document's Maximum Salary column is not sorted on the job rate. This produces an erroneous impression that GBHU is approximately in the middle. When sorted on the job rate (**tab #13**) it becomes obvious that GBHU is actually close to the bottom of the proffered list rather than ***in the middle, which is where the employer stated that they intend to continue paying their office staff.***

THE UNION'S NUMBERS

Each health unit in Ontario has been listed on the spreadsheets at **tab #14**. The comments in the right hand column of the first 2 documents indicate how we received the wage information and the

date(s) covered. The information received directly from the Ministry of Labour CBIS is indicated by asterisks.

The documents following the first 2 spreadsheets show wage comparisons in various ways. The year(s) covered and whether the numbers were adjusted are clearly indicated on the documents.

Every effort has been made to ensure that this information is accurate and up to date. Please contact Ted Loughead at (519) 371-4817 if you would like to receive copy of the actual collective agreement documents or any other material.

CONCLUSION

The Grey Bruce Board of Health is made up of council members elected to represent their constituents. There are also 2 members appointed by the province. The employees of the Grey Bruce Public Health Unit are constituents to whom you are responsible just as you are to all of your other constituents, perhaps more so in your capacity as a member of the BOH. You have a responsibility to oversee the operations of the GBHU in its capacity as an employer to ensure that taxpayers' dollars are spent properly. To carry out your responsibility in this regard you must be provided with accurate information. It is the Union's sincere belief that the information that you have received in Board meetings respecting negotiation of this renewal collective agreement is not as accurate as it needs to be in order for you to make a properly informed decision.

We believe that, with the information provided herein, you will be able to, and indeed have a duty to, stand up for this constituent group against anyone who would deny them fair treatment in their employment.

Thank you again for your commitment to public service, public health, and for taking the time to consider this information. We rely on you to do what is right in as timely a way as possible given the import of this situation.

All of which is respectfully submitted by OPSEU on behalf of its Local 276 – Office and Clerical unit.