



A MEETING THAT DID NOT ADVANCE NEGOTIATIONS

The premier and Treasury Board president called union leaders to a meeting in Montreal on Sunday, May 2. Announcing nothing new, but emphasizing the importance of quickly concluding negotiations, the government simply reiterated its offers, which are neither generous nor reasonable.

Nancy Bédard, FIQ President, had only one message for François Legault and Sonia Lebel at the meeting: the FIQ is ready to reach an intersectoral agreement today if the government agrees to the APTS-FIQ alliance demands, which would help turn things around and truly tackle the serious shortage of healthcare professionals in the health network.

The APTS-FIQ Negotiation Committee had submitted a counteroffer on April 12. The alliance reiterated its demand for a **12.4% salary increase over three years, including a 7.4% salary catch-up** and made several solid recommendations to

- give healthcare professionals an incentive to work longer in advantageous conditions;
- lower the cost of early retirement;
- give parents more flexibility for taking leaves and days off;
- increase days off for pregnant workers;
- broaden the scope of the 8% retention premium, in particular for all employees in Abitibi-Témiscamingue and the Côte-Nord;
- add localities in certain sectors that require a remote premium;
- broaden access to outings;
- require the employer to fully mitigate tax losses linked to any taxable benefits;
- change leave without pay to work in a northern institution to make it more accessible and extend its duration.

There has not been a peep from the government since. And the goal of the meeting the government called was not to advance negotiations. The government plays with numbers when it talks about an 8% offer over three years. What is truly on the table are the 5% increases over three years, with 1% more if the economy does well and inflation is higher than expected, as well as one-time lump sums that are not included in the retirement pension calculation.

And the FIQ definitely did not receive any differential salary offer for healthcare professionals, despite what the premier says.

And yet, the situation in the network is catastrophic: a serious shortage of healthcare professionals, bed closures, service interruptions in almost all institutions. To turn things around, we need salaries that correspond to the professional responsibilities and expertise of nurses, licensed practical nurses, respiratory therapists, and clinical perfusionists. The approved salaries must also be competitive with those offered by private agencies.

What's more, it would be unthinkable for the government to abandon remote communities, especially in Abitibi-Témiscamingue and northern Quebec, where the labour shortage is dire and there are regular service interruptions. We must use all leverage, at any cost, to convince healthcare professionals to stay in the public system or return to it.

Yes, the sectoral agreement on working conditions reached in December will decrease the work overload and improve work-family balance. But we cannot sign a collective agreement without knowing what salaries will be in the coming years! Nor without knowing how healthcare professionals in remote regions will be able to safely provide care.

The ball is in the government's court. FIQ members will vote on a global agreement that includes working conditions as much as salaries, retirement, parental rights, and regional disparities. The referendum will be held online due to the pandemic.

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