
NEWS LOCAL

Area paramedics support contract after one year of being without

By DAWN LALONDE, Mid-North Monitor
Thursday, April 18, 2013 1:59:00 EDT PM

Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) Local 679, which represents approximately 120 paramedics employed by the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board (MSDSB) reached a deal on Feb. 21 after being without a contract for more than a year. This contract affects the Emergency Medical Service paramedics in 13 municipalities and expired on Dec. 31, 2011.

"We have been without a contract for over a year and avoided a strike. There were lots of issues to tackle, it was a long process and we have come to an agreement," said Chris Gillis, president of OPSEU Local 679.

With the many issues still facing them during the negotiations the assistance of a Ministry of Labour conciliator was sought.

Both parties agreed to changes in the contract language for scheduling, wage increases and medical coverage.

"The contract was well supported by our members," said Gillis, who mentioned the membership voted in favour of the contract during the first week of April.

"The terms are a four-year deal starting in Jan. 1, 2012 to Dec. 31, 2015; a year of the deal has already gone," stated CAO Fern Dominelli of the MSDSB.

The contract calls for wage increases of two per cent per year for the first three years and 2.25% for the fourth.

"There were some changes in scheduling that should help with filling shifts, which is one of the challenges we have," said Dominelli.

Some of the scheduling changes are the full-time employees will be asked to book 50% of their vacation in advance. Part-time paramedics will need to schedule their availability up to a year in advance.

There were some improvements in the scheduling language that will allow them to fill shifts a lot easier without incurring overtime and mileage costs.

"We also have a part time pool which will also help with that," continued Dominelli.

There were changes in the drug coverage plan, which now gives the employee 100% coverage on generic brand medications and 70% on brand name drugs. This also comes with a drug card over the previous method of a co-pay system that will allow things to be more streamlined.

The board will only need to acknowledge the contract being ratified during the month's end meeting and they are moving forward to implementation of the new contract.

"It is good for public sector employees to stay near the cost of living in this economic climate," added Gillis.
