Nurses vote to unionize at HHS

More than 900 registered nurses — employed by Halton Healthcare Services (HHS) in Oakville and Milton — voted overwhelmingly to join Canada's largest nurses' union, the Ontario Nursing Association (ONA).

The decision, made earlier this month, was based on a number of factors, explained ONA Provincial President Linda Haslam-Stroud.

One reason was that registered nurses at HHS' Oakville and Milton facilities were seeing the perks enjoyed by the unionized registered nurses in Georgetown, she said.

"Their colleagues at another site, under the same employer, had that voice and had a collective agreement that addressed their wages, working conditions, professional practice issues, etc.," said Haslam-Stroud.

"The discussions from the Halton nurses that we have had with them indicated they were looking for a voice to take forward their issues to the employer.

"They are certainly concerned about their professional practice and the quality of care they are able to provide the patients of Halton Healthcare Services. Their workload was another issue. Their wages, benefits and working conditions were not equal to the nurses that are organized in the ONA, so that was something else.”

HHS President and CEO John Oliver said the decision of the registered nurses of Oakville and Milton to join ONA comes as no surprise.

"Because of Bill 16, an act that froze non-union employees wages, our staff who are non-union have not received pay increases that other hospitals' registered nurses have received," he said.

"It has been a very, very unfair environment for them. So ONA has been working with the nurses here for some time. We have been well aware of that and I think the decision was kind of anticipated because of the Bill 16 environment.”

Haslam-Stroud said ONA will begin working with HHS to negotiate a collective agreement for the Oakville and Milton nurses.

The ONA expects the bargaining process to get underway in March after it meets with its new members and selects a negotiation team.

"The timeline in achieving a collective agreement is going to be, in a large part, based on the employer's response to the negotiation process," said Haslam-Stroud.

"I hope we would be able to work with this employer since they are already familiar with ONA from Georgetown and are already familiar with the ONA collective agreement.”

Oliver called the ONA a "very good organization that has done a superb job of representing registered nurses across the province.”

"They’ve been good partners with hospitals ensuring quality of work life and quality of care for patients is foremost in everyone’s mind," said Oliver.

"We’ve been working with the ONA at the Georgetown site for years and have a very positive working relationship with them.”