

On October 16, nurses from across the province gathered in Winnipeg for MNU's 2018 Education Conference. The annual two-day event brought nearly 200 nurses together at the Radisson Hotel in downtown Winnipeg for a series of workshops and courses about issues impacting the nursing profession and workplaces throughout the province.

The conference got underway on the 16th in the afternoon with registration, followed by a dinner and Q&A with MNU President Darlene Jackson. It was a lively discussion with members asking questions about Bill 28 and bargaining; safety concerns related to an increase in violent incidents in hospitals; and the importance membership engagement ahead of potential representation votes due to Bill 29 and the amalgamation of health care bargaining units.

Jackson had an important message for those concerned about the direction of health care in Manitoba, and the difficulties of working under aggressive cost-cutting measures imposed by the Pallister government.

"All of you are here because you care deeply about your profession and patients," said Jackson. "Together, we need you to be a part of strengthening our union by engaging your fellow nurses and speaking out about ongoing cuts and changes to health care."

Classes got underway the following morning. However, first was a plenary session featuring Brienne Goertzen, Provincial Director of the Manitoba Health Coalition (MHC). Launched this summer, MHC was founded by a coalition of community organizations, labour groups, and local activists who share a common interest in protecting and strengthening universal public health care. MHC is the newest affiliate of the Canadian Health Coalition, which has been fighting against privatization and cuts to public health care since 1979. Goertzen discussed a variety of issues MHC is campaigning on, including a universal pharma care plan and supporting a new bill introduced by the Official Opposition that would ban health care premiums in Manitoba.

"MHC wants to work with nurses to speak out about issues that impact safe, quality care" said Goertzen. "All of you can become activists by signing a petition, sharing information with your colleagues about issues in your workplace and government policies, or attending a rally – it's important to find a way you can contribute to making a difference in your workplace and communities."

During the lunch hour, attendees put their activism to the test by hitting the streets of downtown Winnipeg to collect signatures for MNU's Put Patients First petition. This was the second year MNU has organized a petition blitz during Education Conference, and was again a great success. Over 600 signatures were collected in less than an hour, proving once again why Manitoba's nurses are the most trusted spokespeople in health care.

Classes resumed in the afternoon, which included a wide variety of workshops such as "The Active Nurse", which discussed membership organizing and tips for engaging elected officials; "Speaking Up: Survival Tips for Effective Communications" which addressed interpersonal communications skills and strategies for effective working relationships and conflict prevention; and "Effective Workplace Health & Safety Committees", a technical course on how WHSCs can arm members with knowledge and tools to promote and advocate for safe and health work environments.

Nurses took advantage of the Wednesday evening off by taking part in an MNU-organized paint night at the hotel, or enjoying the many restaurants and amenities downtown Winnipeg has to offer. Classes resumed the following morning, and wrapped up in the late afternoon – but not before the 50-50 draw and handing out prizes for the nurses who collected the most signatures during the petition blitz!

Every year, MNU encourages new members and those who have not attended Education Conference to register. Keep an eye open for registration information a few months in advance; information is provided directly to members and through local-worksite executives.