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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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“Accountability to the Community and Who the Employer Will Actually Be, are concerns with New Health PEI Board” - CUPE

CHARLOTTETOWN – “The new Health PEI Board (detailed in the report and recommendations released yesterday by the Minister of Health), certainly does not appear to establish the “arms length” health oversight we expected, at least not the way we here in the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) understand the words,” says Bill McKinnon, CUPE National Representative.

CUPE represents 950 health care workers on Prince Edward Island. The majority of our membership is support service staff in areas such as Dietary, Housekeeping, Laundry and Maintenance in all the hospitals, manors and addictions services on the Island.

“Unfortunately I am out of province so could not attend the press conference yesterday but I have had the chance to read the report of the Health Governance Advisory Council, which contains numerous recommendations the Minister appears to be accepting, according to media reports.

The two areas that we would have concerns about, are the appointment of Board members, rather than electing them as has been the case in the past with other health boards, and the fact that the new Health PEI Board will not have the power to negotiate collective agreements with their employees.

CUPE and the other health unions participated in a focus group with the Health Governance Advisory Council months ago and the message we sent was clear at that time; make the board accountable to the public by electing at least some of the board members. Unfortunately the Minister and the Advisory Council have left no options open for elected members. From our perspective, that will not make the Board members accountable to the community but, instead, accountable only to the person who appointed them, the Health Minister.

Second, and most confusing and disconcerting for us, is the fact that the Advisory Council recommendations include the recommendation that the Health PEI Board not be involved in negotiating the collective agreements with health care employees. How will that work? If Health PEI does not negotiate our collective agreements, then who is the Employer? If not Health PEI, then that leaves only government as the Employer, and if that is the fact, then where is the “arms length” piece that this new Board was supposed to create? Furthermore, who will be the Employer under our contracts to whom we will turn when issues arise; the Health Minister or Health PEI?

Frankly, this Board seems to have less autonomy and control over the ‘nuts and bolts’ of the entire provincial health system than the local and elected health boards had back in the early 1990’s. We certainly hope appropriate answers to these questions become much clearer as the new Health PEI structure unfolds in 2010/11,” concluded McKinnon.

**For more information, or an interview, please contact:
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