

## Health region adds largest batch of new employees

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The StarPhoenix

*Tuesday, September 12, 2006*

Saskatchewan's largest health-care provider just got bigger as the Saskatoon Health Region hired the most new employees it has ever added in one month.

The region will gain more than 160 new employees, who will include physiotherapists, nurses and support staff.

Provincial Health Minister Len Taylor outlined the importance of the hirings at an event at Royal University Hospital to welcome the new staff.



Taylor said the increase in health workers is a result of the growth of health care and the expansion of the city of Saskatoon itself. He said the Saskatoon Health Region looks after close to 28 per cent of the province's population.

CREDIT: Richard Marjan, The StarPhoenix  
Saskatoon Health Region employees listen to a new staff presentation Monday

"Saskatoon is becoming a predominant force in the delivery of tertiary care, the more serious (and) specialized care that requires additional human resources," Taylor said.

Maura Davies, CEO and president of the Saskatoon Health Region, said the large number of new employees is an effort to fill vacancies created by former staff members who have moved away or retired and that the employee turnover rate for the region is lower than the national average. But she added that more than 100 nursing vacancies remain.

"We are working hard to improve and retain the best possible staff we can," Davies said, "and so the large numbers we got tell us that we are (achieving) some success in making this a place where people want to work." Davies said the areas that need the most workers are the same across the country and include critical or intensive care nurses, pharmacists and ultrasound technicians.

Kerilyn Voigt, spokesperson for the region, said 32 of the new employees will be involved with facility services (maintenance to housekeeping) and 29 with food and nutrition while 22 will be registered nurses and the rest will be "all over the map." Voigt could not say how many of the new recruits will be employed full time.

The group of new employees consists not only of people who live in Saskatoon and have received their training here, but also those who hail from other parts of Saskatchewan and Canada.

"Staff are mobile, oftentimes they come for a number of reasons.

Sometimes they're attracted to the job here but like everybody else they also have family commitments so sometimes they're moving because their spouse or partner is also coming to a job in the city," Davies said when asked what draws workers from out of province.

Karl Rhebergen, 22, is one such worker. He said he originally moved to Saskatoon from northern British Columbia because his wife is attending the veterinary college at the University of Saskatchewan.

He said he decided to take a job with the Saskatoon Health Region because "it's an opportunity to take a new position and learn some new things (and) I find learning new things fascinating." Rhebergen, who received his training in Prince George at the University of Northern B.C., explained what drew him to the field of nursing.

"The fact (of) caring for other people . . . being around other people, talking to (them and) meeting new people," Rhebergen said, "It's a great profession; there's lots of exciting things to see and do and endless opportunities to learn."

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