

N.L. Opposition leader not welcome at hospital

Last Updated: Friday, February 20, 2009 | 4:40 PM NT

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Newfoundland and Labrador's government Opposition leader is accusing the head of one of the province's four health authorities of trying to keep her from meeting with nurses.

Labrador MHA Yvonne Jones was set to meet with nurses on their coffee break at a hospital in Gander earlier this week but she was surprised to learn she was not welcome in the facility. Jones is blaming Central Health CEO Karen McGrath.

"She was prepared to shut down the meeting. She basically said that there would be no meetings and I wasn't welcome to have meetings with nurses in her facility," said Jones. "This was very much a single-handed effort by the CEO to stop me from meeting with nurses at a time when their issues were very critical and very much in the public arena."

Jones went ahead and met with nurses in the hospital cafeteria without incident.

Nurses have been working to rule to put pressure on the province to negotiate a new contract with them. Late last year, some nurses in central Newfoundland were disciplined for refusing to do "non-nursing duties," such as emptying garbage pails, restocking shelves and clerical tasks.

Nurses are now in the second week of a provincewide strike vote that's expected to take six weeks to complete. The nurses' union says it won't sit down to negotiate with the province until the vote is finished. The province's more than 5,000 nurses will be in a legal strike position in April.

There is a severe shortage of nurses in Newfoundland and Labrador. Their union says pay and working conditions must improve substantially in order to recruit and retain more of them.