

**July 2021**

## **Voting on DHBs' MECA offer to open next Wednesday**

The DHBs' latest offer now includes commitments agreed in January that we reported on last month.

Unresolved is the lack of back pay or a lump sum in lieu of backdating. The MERAS MECA expired on 31 January, but because you had a pay increase last August, the DHBs are arguing your next pay rise is not due till 1 August 2021.

The fact that this last pay increase was 1.25% because it was for six months only, and that this was agreed before the Government's wage restraints, has not so far persuaded the DHBs from their hard-line position.

We have been taking an equally hard-line position with the DHBs, especially after meetings by Zoom with your workplace reps last week confirmed that this was an issue over which they were prepared to recommend industrial action when voting opens on Wednesday.

We told the DHBs' advocates to go back to the "powers that be" to reconsider. We feel strongly that this is a breach of good faith, as are the DHBs' failure to meet with us and their lengthy delays.

The pay offer has not changed. The proposed new salary rates are attached. The pay increase for Core midwives on Step 7 is just over 1.5% (equivalent to CPI, the cost of living index) and around 2% for new grads.

The DHBs argue that the outcome of the pay equity process will be a new salary scale for midwives which will address the historical undervaluing of your profession. We are nearing the negotiation phase of the pay equity process and while we are confident there will be a pay increase, we have real concerns about misperceptions of midwifery.

We have agreed to postpone opening the ballot till **Wednesday, 7 July**, so the DHBs can present their best offer. You will then vote **YES** or **NO** to the proposed changes to the MECA. Unless there is an offer on backpay by then, the ballot will include a vote on industrial action, as well as a number of other actions to persuade the decision-makers.

Your workplace reps are holding paid union meetings during the next two weeks where they will go over the package and you can discuss and vote on it collectively. Zoom will be offered where possible for those off duty at the time. The offer will be on the MERAS website, as will the presentation slides for the meetings, in case you cannot attend.

### **The offer will include:**

- A Continuing Professional Development Fund with \$1000 to be put into the fund for every midwife each year, an outcome of the working party from the last MECA settlement.
- Midwifery Career Pathway developed through the Midwifery Accord, also an outcome of the last MECA.
- The MERAS Rostering Guidelines will be included in the MECA and there are new meal and rest break provisions.
- New midwifery employees will be given the terms and conditions of the MERAS MECA as we now have majority membership of midwives in every DHB.
- Coverage of maternity care assistants who are midwifery students working in a housekeeping role, giving them the opportunity to earn money while they are studying for their degree.
- Non-union midwives will pay a bargaining fee to MERAS, which will be the same as the union subs, payable over the next two years.
- A policy will be developed to ensure flight midwives are looked after by the receiving DHB following a survey MERAS conducted last year.
- Better support around sentinel/adverse events, including paid special leave if needed (this won't come off your sick leave entitlement).
- MERAS to work with Midwifery Leaders on flexible work arrangements, including working from home where appropriate.
- ACC top-up for injuries sustained through workplace assaults (won't come off sick leave).
- In public health emergencies like Covid, the DHBs will "take a permissive approach" to paid special leave if you or your dependents are unwell, or you are at a higher risk (e.g. underlying medical condition or pregnancy).

**Caroline Conroy, Co-leader (Midwifery)**  
**Jill Ovens, Co-leader (Industrial)**