



Re-Elect

# Shelley Kowalchuk

Physiotherapy Director

*WORKING FOR OUR MEMBERS,  
WORKING FOR YOU*

I have been working as a physiotherapist at Health Sciences Centre since 1997; I work in neuro physiotherapy and also with multi-trauma clients at the Rehab Hospital. I have been working in healthcare for twenty-two years, but my previous career was in desktop publishing.

I have always been involved with many social justice causes, so when I became a physiotherapist, I quickly became involved in union activities to help my colleagues in our profession. Soon after I started at HSC, I was on the bargaining committee for physios when we were in MGEU. After our group joined MAHCP in 2004, I became a staff rep (renamed Member Advocate a few years ago) for PTs at the Rehab Hospital, which I have continued to this day.

In 2005 I became Physiotherapy Director, and remained in this position until 2016. After a brief respite, I rejoined Executive Council in 2017 till today. I have always been active in advocating for our profession (being on the CPA board for a number of years) and representing physio in our union has, in part, defined my career.

## ADVOCACY FOR PHYSIOTHERAPISTS

As many of you remember, our public profession was under attack in July 2017. As a Director on our union, my job is to represent all members. However, as a physiotherapist, and a vocal critic of this policy, I felt our union needed to speak to the public and get Manitobans on our side, and I stepped up in several ways:

- On behalf of our union, I spoke at a rally at the Legislature, calling out our government and speaking to our value in the public system. As a result, I was interviewed by CBC on TV and our rally was covered by many media outlets.
- I was a speaker at a Public Forum hosted by the Liberal Party, and was able to talk to the public about the need to maintain physio outpatient services in all our hospitals.
- I was a strong advocate for public practice to our MPA branch; I also lobbied various WRHA officials to explain the need to preserve outpatient departments
- I spoke at a broadcasted CBC Forum on Healthcare, describing how physiotherapy services kept patients healthier and decreased re-admittance to hospital
- Seeing a need for a strong statement from physiotherapists, I also wrote a letter that physios could send to their MLAs

While many of us were frustrated by the outcome - losing positions, departments and having patients forced to the private system - in all the conversations I've had with members of the public, I could see that Manitobans were supportive of us, more aware of our role in the healthcare system and had a better understanding of our value.

## OTHER UNION ACTIVITIES:

### Committee work:

I was on the Communications Committee and became chair of the committee and Secretary for the union in June 2013. Communication is such an important part of reaching the public, informing Government and consolidating our place in the minds of Manitobans. As part of the Communication committee, I advocated to hire a PR company to help make our union more known to Manitobans, an important strategy to show Manitobans who we are and how important our work is. When we started Bargaining, our committee worked to keep members informed through Bargaining Beats and we promoted letter-writing to MLAs and sending postcards to the Minister of Health.

I was the chair of the Social Action Committee from 2012 to 2015. As chair I oversaw organizing members for our public outreach such as the Canadian Diabetes Runs and our first Dragon Boat team.

I was Newsletter Editor for 3 years where I wrote many articles about Medicare, Government and Labour issues. For two years on Council, I was on Management Committee, where I assisted with budgets and financial oversight. Most recently on I have been on Governance Committee, which focuses on policy creation and the constitution.

I have been on some hospital committees for a number of years, representing our union. I had been the chair of



*Health care rally at the Legislature*

the Rehab Hospital Workplace Safety and Health committee for several years. I had also been on the Employee Management Council for several years, at HSC.

### LIFE BEFORE PHYSIOTHERAPY

Physiotherapy was not my first career. I graduated from U of M with a B.A. in 1983 and because of my experience with the U of M student newspaper *The Manitoban*, I worked in various print shops around Winnipeg. I will point out that they were not unionized positions, and it was this experience, among many, that taught me how important it was to be in a union.

From 1983-85 I backpacked through Europe, living in England for 10 months and worked at a publishing company, Haymarket Publishers. I also lived and worked in Ireland for 3 months, and lastly in Australia, where I once again worked as a layout artist.

When I returned to Winnipeg in 1985, I returned to working in the print profession, but eventually decided to return to school in 1993, which brings me back to where I am now – in physiotherapy.