

NFU waiting on SER advisory report

The advisory report of the Social and Economic Council (SER) about the problems and opportunities for work in the healthcare sector has been delayed but is expected soon. The unions have requested another meeting.

The cao-delegation of the NFU suspended the negotiations until the formation of a new Cabinet and publication of the SER advisory report. The new Cabinet can implement the already approved motion to reward all healthcare staff better and provide follow-up to the contents of the SER advisory report. The SER will suggest solutions to make working in the healthcare sector more attractive. The advisory report was meant to be published at the beginning of April, but has been postponed.

Making choices

The limited financial leeway means that choices will have to be made for the available budget. The UMCs want improvements specifically in nursing jobs, reduction of work pressure, and professional & personal development. Cao-negotiator Karen Kruijthof explained, “The dilemma of making choices because of limiting boundary conditions is also evident in the healthcare bonus for 2021: €500 net for people working directly in COVID-related care or a lower sum for all healthcare employees. VWS is now faced with the choice of one of these two options. We also see a scarcity dilemma concerning the vaccinations: should only staff working directly in COVID-related care be assigned priority for vaccinations or all staff providing direct patient care? These are choices that we do not want to make. But that is the reality we are faced with, the circumstances make these choices inevitable. We can certainly understand that people are disappointed about this.”

“We are aware that in this corona crisis not just healthcare workers but all UMC employees are being called upon to do an awful lot. We would love to give everyone a salary raise, but the financial situation of the UMCs and the economic forecast do not permit this. We cannot spend money that we do not have. But we are now noticing some room for various substantial improvements in the new cao. We feel it’s unfortunate that they are being shelved for now.”

Together with the unions

Cao-negotiator Gabriël Zwart added, “Of course we are open to talking with the unions, so we shall be holding a meeting soon. It seems sometimes as if we are standing on opposite sides, but both the UMCs and the unions want the best outcome for the UMC employees. We are not only working together on a new cao, we are also talking to each other in other roundtables. A good example is the discussion in the Labour Market Fund SoFoKles. At this Sociaal Fonds voor de KennisSector (SoFoKleS; social fund for the knowledge sector), employees and employers from universities, research institutions and university medical centres come together to elaborate the design of an attractive work environment. We have jointly commissioned research into psychosocial aftercare for employees dealing with the negative consequences of the long-term and intensive corona healthcare. Along with experiences inside the UMCs, the approach in other sectors was also

examined, like that of the Ministry of Defence. We decided together with the unions that each UMC can request €100,000 in subsidy this year from SoFoKleS to provide the UMC employees with additional psychosocial aftercare support.”

Karen Kruijthof said, “Regarding the scope of this cao, unfortunately very little has changed in the current financial situation compared with mid-March. The unions want a structural, generic wage increase, and we at the UMCs have no financial leeway to fulfil this wage demand.”

Healthcare bonus 2021: caretaker minister is faced with deciding how to share the available budget

On 22 April 2021, the House of Representatives debated again over the healthcare bonus pledged for 2021. The caretaker Cabinet seems to prefer a lower healthcare bonus for all employees in the healthcare sector.

It was originally suggested that healthcare staff who worked during the corona crisis in 2021 would be entitled to a healthcare bonus of €500 net. In total, the Cabinet has reserved €720 million for the healthcare bonus this year. That is not enough to give €500 to all employees working in the healthcare sector. The caretaker Cabinet does not want to provide any more money to increase the total. This means a choice has to be made between €500 for healthcare professionals in direct COVID-related healthcare, or a sum of €200-240 for all employees in the healthcare sector. The caretaker Cabinet seems to prefer a healthcare bonus for all employees in the healthcare sector. Caretaker Minister Van Ark will take a decision soon and elaborate the scheme. Then it will become clear whether the same boundary conditions apply to the healthcare bonus in 2021 that applied in 2020.