

dialogue

An update on issues
affecting health care in Ontario

July 18, 2008

Marin to investigate enforcement of long term care standards

OPSEU members encouraged to come forward with information

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Unable to directly investigate long term care homes, Ontario Ombudsman André Marin announced July 16 that he would instead send in a special team to spend the next six months looking at the province's enforcement and monitoring of standards in the nursing home industry.

His investigation will also look at the 463 standards and regulations to determine if they direct good care or whether, as the industry contends, they are "piddling bureaucratic rules" that take time away from care.

The announcement comes a week after OPSEU, ONA, SEIU and CUPE held a press conference at Queen's Park criticizing Shirlee Sharkey's government-appointed review of nursing home staffing standards. Health care unions and community groups have been advocating a minimum average staffing standard of at least 3.5 hours of direct care per resident per day. In her final report, Sharkey instead bowed to the owner's call to self-police on the issue, recommending guidelines instead of a regulation.

Premier Dalton McGuinty responded to the union press conference by stating the province had to do better, a point Marin also picked up in his remarks.

About \$3 billion is spent by the Ontario government on long term care homes. It is estimated that to get the homes to a 3.5 hour standard, it would cost about \$700 million more.

While the for-profit homes have fought such a regulation, the Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors has called for a standard and \$350 million more in funding to bring the province's nursing homes from 2.6 hours of care to 3 hours of care.

Three provinces – Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta – and 37 U.S. States already have adopted staffing

standards. Ontario had a standard of 2.25 hours of care in the 1990s before Mike Harris scrapped it in 1995.

Meanwhile, OPSEU members are encouraged to come forward with their experiences with long term care and/or the province's monitoring system. Complaints can be filed by calling 1-800-263-1830 or online at the Ombudsman's web site: www.ombudsman.on.ca.

Kincardine residents will have to pay for private outpatient physio, Walkerton may follow

A private for-profit physiotherapy company is moving into the Kincardine Hospital, charging for outpatient services that used to be publicly-funded. PT Health will displace the hospital's former physiotherapy department in August. While the hospital will contract PT Health for inpatient services, outpatients must have the means to pay for their physiotherapy or drive at least 45 minutes to another site of South Bruce Grey Health Centre. The option to travel may be further limited as the hospital corporation is planning to do the same at the Walkerton Hospital, the largest facility at the multi-site rural hospital. Reducing covered inpatient services is a particular mystery given SBGHC has been successful in balancing its budgets. The move may backfire – much of the equipment for the physiotherapy department was purchased with donations from the community. The negative impact of the decision may dry up funds flowing to the foundation.

Strike ends as Grey Bruce Health Unit wins 12 per cent

After ten weeks on the picket line, Local 276, representing the office and clerical staff of the Grey Bruce Health Unit, has emerged with a three-year agreement including wage increases totaling 12 per cent. The long and bitter strike brought out overwhelming support from the communities of Grey and Bruce

Counties, where 27 OPSEU women worked to counter an employer policy of spending freely on buildings and top brass while pinching pennies on front-line staff. The strike began May 1, and effectively ended in the wee hours of July 10, with the signing of a three-year tentative deal.

In Brief

Central East LHIN fails to get quick court dismissal of OPSEU complaint

The fight over mental health bed cuts at the Ajax-Pickering hospital ended up in court on July 11. The Ontario Superior Court listened to arguments from OPSEU, the Central East LHIN and the Rouge Valley Health System over whether the law was followed in the decision-making process. While the hospital and LHIN had hoped for a quick dismissal, the judges reserved their decision amid the vast amount of evidence presented in the day-long hearing. The application for judicial review was launched after the Central East LHIN failed to consult on a RVHS plan to close 20 mental health beds in Ajax and instead use the resources to establish a new medical/psychiatric unit at Scarborough Centenary hospital. The transfer also included shifting the psychiatric intensive care unit from Ajax to Scarborough. Through the proceedings, evidence was presented

that showed the hospital and LHIN worked to keep the issue from the public, including a letter from the hospital that possibly misled local activists about the hospital's intentions.... OPSEU, ONA, SEIU and CUPE have written to the Needle Safety Regulatory review calling for the expansion of scope and coverage of regulations government the use of safety engineered sharps. The government plans to make safety-engineered needles mandatory in hospitals by September. The unions are arguing that more devices could be made mandatory, and that many more workplaces should be covered at the same time.... OPSEU and the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) have embarked on an historic central pay equity maintenance process in more than 40

Ontario hospitals. The process involves 6,500 employees working in over 200 paramedical professions, including Medical Laboratory Technologists, Medical Radiation Technologists, Physiotherapists, Social Workers, Pharmacy Technicians, Pharmacists, ECG Technicians and other diagnostic, therapeutic and rehabilitation professions Ontario's health care unions will be meeting in the fall to discuss how to get the government to fully fund the provincial agreement on human resources adjustment plans in the event of a LHIN integration. At a July 14 meeting of the Health Sector Labour Market Adjustment Forum the government refused to agree to the funding commitment in the framework, effectively derailing the process.

New health sector members join OPSEU

OPSEU's health sector continues to grow. Since the beginning of 2008 six new groups of health care workers have chosen OPSEU. Employees at the Meaford Long Term Care Centre recently joined as have paramedicals at Ottawa's Carefor Health and Community Services, the Temiskaming Hospital and the Hanover and District Hospital. In January diagnostic imaging employees at Barrie's Royal Victoria Hospital voted to join the union, as did members of the Canadian Mental Health Association Branch - Elgin.

ONTARIO HEALTH COALITION

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- Regular minimum care standards for nursing homes
 - Stop privatization and two-tier extra billing

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For more information, go to www.web.net/ohc/