



Welcome back Bill Koftopoulos



lights and sirens

A Publication for Paramedics by Paramedics about Paramedics

OPSEU Ambulance Division

Fall 2002

“If you talk the talk, you must walk the walk”

Over the past few months, I have had the opportunity to meet and speak with Paramedics from across the province. All appear to have a common goal: Promote and advance Paramedics as professionals.

The Paramedic profession is comprised of many classifications, ranging from Critical Care attendants to Volunteers. All are recognized by legislation, and all serve a vital role in this great profession.

In today's "political climate," we face enough adversity and challenge without having to worry about internal strife. When we speak of Paramedics, we should be speaking of the profession, not focusing on a specific classification. When we negotiate, we should be negotiating fairly and equitably for all classifications. No classification's gain should be at another classification's expense.

Responsibility for land ambulance delivery was turned over to Upper Tiered municipalities commencing January 1, 2001. Legislatively, previous crown agencies that were downloaded prior to May 2001 did not have successor rights. There are horror stories of degradation and processes that Paramedics were made to go through to apply for positions with the new

employer. The majority were successful, however, some were not. They were denied jobs for various reasons, most of them appearing petty and vindictive.

Successor rights were reinstated with the passing of Bill 58 in May 2001. This guarantees Paramedics jobs when a "sale of business" occurs. No more degradation, no more processes, no more "personality" clashes and, most importantly, everyone gets a job if they meet the requirements under the Ambulance Act.

The Ambulance Division executive strongly recommends that when negotiations are commenced with the new employer that the #1 demand be: **any Paramedic that was denied employment because of the lack of successor rights (downloaded prior to May 2001), be given employment at their previous classification.** If the general membership requires further information or wishes to discuss this issue, the Division executive would be more than willing to attend any meeting in order to see that this demand is carried through to fruition.

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“If you talk the talk...”

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The Ambulance Division Executive have met with members of CUPE’s Ambulance Committee to explore the possibility of addressing issues that pertain to Paramedics on a



united front. In the past, both unions have addressed the same issues, but separately. We believe that this joint effort will best serve the Paramedics and the profession. Both parties welcomed this process with enthusiasm. As with the seasons, there will be changes. New challenges and new demands will be placed upon us. We will meet them head on. Paramedics are professionals and deserve respect and recognition. It is imperative, that if we talk the talk, we walk the walk.

On behalf of the Division executive
Jamie Ramage
Chair

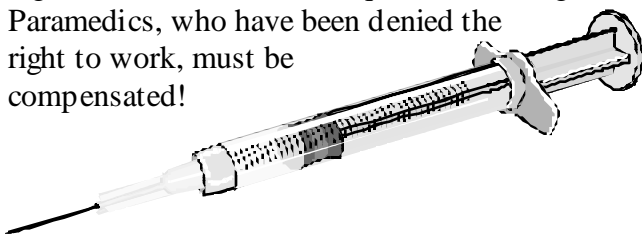
Government reverses mandatory flu shots

On Thursday October 3, 2002, the government rescinded mandatory influenza vaccination for Paramedics. As Paramedics, we now have the same choice as every other citizen of Ontario.

Accolades to those Paramedics whose actions allowed for the Charter of Rights challenge to be initiated.

Thank you to all Paramedics and other Health Care Professionals who supported our endeavours to bring about this change.

Given the far-reaching ramifications of this legislation, return to status quo is not enough. Paramedics, who have been denied the right to work, must be compensated!



As professionals, the Ambulance Executive asks, that you review the information pertaining to voluntary influenza vaccination and make an informed decision. Recent changes to EHS Patient care and transport standards have introduced protocols that will seriously impede, on our right to decide, whether or not to receive the vaccination. In light of these changes, we ask that any paramedic who chooses to have the vaccination, not submit proof of immunization to their employer. By refusing to submit proof, you will greatly assist the division in it’s efforts to fight EHS on these discriminatory practice.

This legislation was wrong!
All wrongs must be made right!

OPSEU at work

Lindsay District: Wage rates awarded

A top wage rate of \$24.55 for P1 and \$27.35 for P2 has been awarded. The rate took affect April 01, 2002. The service will be taken “in house”, January 01, 2003.

City of Kawartha Lakes: Charges filed

The City of Kawartha Lakes has refused to recognize OSPEU as the present bargaining agent for the Paramedics. It has also refused to recognize successor rights for the Paramedics as guaranteed under Bill 58. A deputation to City Council in June failed to change their position. Labour charges have been filed and are scheduled to be heard in October.

Oxford County: Wheels in motion

The negotiating team is moving along. The team has been updated, and is aware of the most recent agreements. They have stated, “we will settle for nothing less.”

Grey County: Ambulance Decision to be “Appealed”

The Ontario Public Service Employees Union (OPSEU) initiated legal action to overturn a May 8th Ontario Labour Relations Board (OLRB) decision related to the integration of Fire and Ambulance Services within the County of Grey.

“The OLRB decision contains at least three very serious ‘errors in law’, and cries out to be Judicially Reviewed,” says Terry Moore, the OPSEU Staff Representative representing the affected Paramedics. OPSEU currently represents all 65 Paramedics in Grey County pending a determination as to whether or not

they are “Firefighters” within the meaning of the *Fire Prevention and Protection Act*.

The May 8 decision was supposed to make a clear and unequivocal decision whether or not the Paramedics employed by the City of Owen Sound Fire are “Firefighters” and therefore properly placed within the Firefighters’ Bargaining Unit.

The majority decision fails to make that determination despite finding that “...the pre-conditions are not there for a clear declaration that the City has established that the Paramedics are in fact Firefighters.” Instead, the majority decision “deems” Paramedics to be Firefighters for a period of 18 months, after which OPSEU can reactivate its claim if there has been insufficient progress toward turning both Firefighters and Paramedics into an entirely new entity called “Firemedic”.

“As the dissent by the Chair of the Board, Christopher Albertyn, makes clear, the majority failed to issue a decision consistent with its own findings of fact, and thereby made serious legal errors,” says Mr. Moore.

OPSEU won the Judicial Review that was completed in late August. The decision by the Divisional Court is as follows: “The decision (by the Labour board) is therefore quashed. The matter is to be reheard in its entirety by a panel of the Board as configured by the Chair of the Board, with such new panel not being bound by any conclusions or findings of the previous panel. The City is to pay costs to OPSEU \$2500 and the Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 443 \$1500, all as agreed at the time of our reserving our decision.”

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Brant County: Still negotiating

The service remains in active negotiations, with further meeting dates scheduled. Given the recent agreement in Simcoe County, it is hoped that Brant County will achieve the same monetary gains.

Simcoe County: Agreement reached

After 20 months of runoff votes, negotiations, conciliation, mediation and, to a certain extent, arbitration, we have a first collective agreement in Simcoe County. This agreement is between OPSEU Local 911 (303) and Health Trust Pre Hospital Services Inc., a private company that was successful in acquiring the contract to administer the provision of ambulance services in Simcoe County.

Some of the highlights of this agreement are:

PIs in the county now earn \$24.75 per hour and \$25.50 as of July, 2003. These rates are the fourth highest in the Province at the time of this printing. The total monetary value of the agreement equates to a 28% increase, or approximately \$30,000 over the term of the collective agreement (not including overtime, shift premiums, statutory holidays etc.).

Gains were also made in all of the following areas: health and welfare benefits, sick leave, bereavement leave, per cent in lieu of benefits for part-time employees, vacation allotment for less senior medics, shift premiums, statutory holidays and statutory holiday pay. A "justice and dignity" clause was also successfully negotiated which will ensure that medics who are suspended or discharged receive full pay during the grievance process.

Plans for Advance Life Support have been approved but funding is not forthcoming at this point. We are currently waiting for funding for 3 more stations, 5 additional vehicles and 40 additional BLS medics. These enhancements are necessary to achieve the 1996 response time mandate handed down by the Provincial Government.

Hamilton: Charges filed

Numerous unfair labour practice charges filed against the Corporation of the City of Hamilton, (with some dating back as far as Aug. 2000) were fully resolved on June 6, 2002. The highlight of the settlement was the negotiation of a 3-step grievance procedure to deal with future disputes.

Paramedics in Hamilton were initially forced into a CUPE bargaining unit against their expressed wishes. The timely filing of a certification application resulted in a favourable ruling by the OLRB granting OPSEU exclusive bargaining rights for all front line paramedics in Hamilton. Through numerous proceedings, the employer (City of Hamilton) argued in favour of one large bargaining unit, comprised of all existing inside & outside workers (represented by CUPE), all paramedics & Hamilton housing workers (represented by OPSEU), transit workers (represented by ATU), nurses (represented by ONA) and all operating engineers (represented by IUOE).

In May of 2002, the OLRB agreed that one large bargaining unit would rationalize labour relations with in the newly created City of Hamilton.

"Our representation status as paramedics remains uncertain," said Local 256 President Mario Posteraro. "Our desire for a stand alone, paramedics only bargaining unit does not appear to be possible with this ruling and this legislation."

Voting details and dates are being finalized at time of printing.

**Lights and Sirens is
available online at:**
[http://www.opseu.org/bps/
health/ambulance/index.htm](http://www.opseu.org/bps/health/ambulance/index.htm)

Welcome to our new Dispatch Advisor

We would like to take this opportunity to welcome Patrick Fry-Smith as our Dispatch Advisor.

At minimum, Patrick will attend one day of each of the quarterly Divisional executive meetings, having voice but no vote. Patrick will be the contact person for dispatch, with the responsibility of gathering and distributing information as it becomes available.

Patrick has worked hard with Sandy Edwards to bring public attention to the Dispatch crisis. The

Ambulance division applauds Patrick and Sandy for their efforts and fully supports them in their future endeavours.

Please take the time to circulate and complete the petition on Page 5. If at any time during the performance of your duties you feel your Health and Safety has been jeopardized as a result of dispatch issues, please file a health and safety complaint with your employer.

Is your call for help being answered?

In a recent newspaper article, Tonia Kinch, former Dispatcher turned Paramedic, put it best when she said, “They’re always understaffed, every day.”

Operations at the provinces eleven provincially run dispatch centres are at critical levels. During an external review of CACCs, the IBI Group found some alarming facts:

- Each dispatcher handle 6,400 calls per year—that is 2,200 calls more than recommended and almost five times the number handled by local fire dispatchers.
- The computer and radio equipment that is in use today is the same equipment that the OPP abandoned over five years ago because it was obsolete.
- Wages in most cases are \$15,000-\$20,000 less than other emergency dispatchers.

This wage disparity has caused a staffing crisis at many centres—the Hamilton CACC alone has lost 23 dispatchers in two years. In the words of our president, “The public’s safety is at risk because of the government’s neglect!”

Members in London report being told to bring their children into work when babysitting prevented a dispatcher from coming in for overtime. Staff has begun to protest conditions there and refuse to wear their uniforms.

In Thunder Bay dispatchers have had to work 24 hour shifts. Mississauga dispatchers continue to have the ministry order food for them as they are not able to leave their desks for breaks. Situations being reported across the province resemble working conditions you would expect from a third world country.

Since the release of the IBI report in May, just after the OPS Strike, OPSEU has embarked upon a campaign to ensure the government follows through on the recommendations. This includes a vast amount of media attention, visits with politicians and charges of bargaining in bad faith. The province-wide battle continues. A trip to Queen’s Park (and much more) is in the works.

We are now calling on all Paramedics for your help. A petition has been started that we hope all paramedics to sign and support. Not only is the public at risk when CACCs are short staffed, but the paramedics are at risk as well. A dispatcher trying to dispatch from two desks or taking a 911 call may not hear your call for help.

If you have any questions or can offer assistance, please call Patrick Fry-Smith at (905) 923-2911 or e-mail at pfry@metrocity.com.

Petition to avert a crisis at Ontario's ambulance dispatch centres

To the Legislative Assembly of Ontario:

Whereas the eleven Central Ambulance Communication Centres (CACCs) operated by the Ministry of Health are chronically under-staffed and under-funded;

Whereas the dispatching of ambulances is a key link in the chain of emergency response;

Whereas the CACCs are chronically short-staffed;

Whereas in comparison with other emergency dispatch services, the staff turnover rate is two to three times higher and the volume of calls handled by each dispatcher is two to three times higher according to the *External Review of Hamilton CACC* by consultants the IBI Group;

Whereas "rapid turnover of staff is attributed to high workload, stress and relatively low wages," according to the IBI Group's report;

Whereas the radio and computer systems at the provincial CACCs are not as technologically advanced as those systems used by fire and police dispatch services;

Whereas the short staffing and the lack of up-to-date equipment at the CACCs effects ambulance paramedics;

Whereas paramedics share the dispatchers' concerns that chronic short-staffing is a major risk to public safety;

Therefore, we the undersigned, petition the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as follows:

To safeguard our emergency medical services and the health and safety of Ontario's citizens, the Ontario government must immediately implement the recommendations of the IBI Group's report at all eleven of the provincial CACCs. The recommendations include: wage parity with other emergency response dispatch services so the CACCs can attract and keep qualified staff, hiring additional staff, and installing up-to-date radio and computer systems.

Name	Address	Signature

Please photocopy and circulate the above petition

Service Contacts

The following, are the list of members we have as service contacts. It is our intention to secure one contact at each service/centre. The division will use these people as initial contacts to help distribute information to the membership at large. The division suggests that each service/centre set up their own distribution system to ensure information gets to their respective members. We appreciate the assistance of the members as we strive to develop a system that will be efficient, streamlined, cost effective and timely. Please review the list, and if there are any errors of omissions, send them to Jamie. Each contact should forward to Jamie their mailing address, telephone number and e-mail address.

**The Ambulance
Division has a new
phone number!
1-289-260-4728**



Amherstburg, Local 136.....Dave McGregor
 Thames, Local 147.....John Rhinehart
 Oxford, Local 114.....Mike Maycock
 Brant, Local 256.....Dale Vining
 Bruce Cty., Local 250.....Peter Shaw
 Grey Cty., Local 250.....Paul McKay
 Norfolk, Local 221.....Stew Burnett
 Wellington, Local 231.....Barry Wood
 Peel, Local 277.....Brenda Wilson-Young
 Halton, Local 207.....Brian Dowd
 Hamilton, Local 256.....Mario Posteraro

Durham Dis., Local ?.....Sandy Edwards
 Bancroft, Local 356.....Mike Bay
 Northumberland, Local 344.....Troy Ward
 Simcoe County, Local 3-911.....Carl Eichenberger
 Victoria County, Local 309.....Curtis Lane
 Belleville, Local 457.....Chris Barry
 Kingston, Local 462.....Terry Baker
 French River, Local 628.....Darryl Taylor
 Parry Sound, Local 637.....Jim Cousins
 Temagami, Local 647.....Michael McGaughey
 Dispatch.....Patrick Fry-Smith

AMBULANCE DIVISION EXECUTIVE 2001 - 2003

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