

dialogue

February 15, 2007

A bi-weekly update on issues
affecting health care in Ontario

Dietitians of Canada
<http://www.dietitians.ca/index.asp>
Hospital Professionals Scholarships
<http://www.opseu.org/notices/opseuscholar.htm>

1 in 4 long term care residents at serious nutrition risk

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Province expects \$5.46 per day to cover three meals, beverages, snacks and dietary supplements

About three quarters of Ontario's long term care residents are at moderate to high "nutrition risk" according to a Dietitians of Canada (DC) 2006 report.

In a May 2006 survey of 85 Ontario long term care homes conducted by the DC Gerontology Network, 25 per cent of residents are at high nutrition risk, 54 per cent a moderate risk, and a further 10 per cent a low risk.

The report advocates Ontario to increase its raw food allowance for long term care homes to \$6.75 immediately, and \$7.00 by October, 2007.

Ontario presently expects long term care homes to provide two choices at each of three meals per day, plus beverages, snacks and dietary supplements. If a home is not willing to supplement that allowance, residents are likely to face a repetitive menu that lacks in fresh fruit and vegetables, limited high fibre products and poor quality substitutions.

Given overwhelming evidence to suggest that proper diet plays a key role in preventing more costly medical interventions, Ontario's reluctance to significantly address this issue is puzzling. In July of last year the government increased raw food funding by only 12 cents. At the time, NDP leader Howard Hampton pointed out it wasn't enough to even buy an apple.

While the Eves government did substantially raise the raw food allowance in 2003, (from \$4.49/day to \$5.24/day) much

of this additional funding has been offset by ministry of health requirements for more resident meal choices, which costs about 10 to 15 per cent more.

Limited staffing budgets have also driven up food costs. With fewer kitchen staff, homes are relying on more expensive pre-prepared foods.

The increase in acuity — or level of care required by residents — has provided an additional drain on raw food resources. Many more patients now require extensive and complex diets, such as low lactose milk, soya milk, low sodium products and gluten-free products. These are all more expensive to maintain.

Pureed and minced menus can cost as much as 16 per cent more than the regular menu. With 12 per cent of Ontario residents on pureed foods, and 21 per cent on minced foods, this has significant impact on food budgets.

When various factors are taken into consideration, the average amount homes receive to feed a resident per day is calculated to be about \$3.44 according to DC.

The call for increased funding for raw food is growing. The Ontario Association of Non-Profit Homes and Services for Seniors is supporting the call for a \$7.00 a day allowance, while the Canadian Legion is asking for \$7.50.

OPSEU's Long Term Care Sector Executive will be discussing launching its own campaign at the upcoming Feb. 22 meeting.



NDP Leader Howard Hampton speaks to union activists at the Humber River Regional Hospital Feb. 5. Three unions were protesting the hospital's appeal of a ministry of labour order requiring the use of safety engineered sharps.

Toronto Central LHIN looks to meet with labour

The Toronto Central LHIN is arranging a meeting with health care unions on March 20, from 2-4 pm. OPSEU Locals within the geographic boundaries of the LHIN can send up to two members to this meeting. If your local would like to be part of the OPSEU contingent, please contact Rick Janson by March 16 (e-mail below). The Central LHIN is also meeting with a smaller number of union activists March 21st.

Calendar Woes

The 2007 OPSEU pocket calendar was a big hit, however, there was one small miss. The month of July has two July 10ths and no July 31st. We would recommend that members fix this error by renumbering the calendar page beginning with the second July 10th, which should be July 12.