

# dialogue

March 29, 2007

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

## Health and the Ontario budget

LTC Homes disappointed with one more minute  
of care per resident

21

**T**he Ontario budget held few surprises for the health care sector, with many of the initiatives having been previously announced.

The biggest disappointment was the lack of funding for long term care homes. Despite promising staffing standards later this spring, only \$14 million has been earmarked to hire more nurses in the sector. The Ontario Long Term Care Association estimates that this new funding will buy one more minute of care per resident per day. Ontario lags far behind long term care staffing levels in other provinces.

Funding for healthcare is \$37.9 billion of a \$91.2 billion budget, or about 42 per cent of government spending. About half of this money comes from federal transfer payments, proceeds from lottery and gaming, employer health tax and the Ontario Health Premium (OHP). The OHP, which deducts up to \$900 per year from workers' paycheques, accounts for \$2.6 billion in revenue, or 7.2 per cent of total health funding.

While government continually raises the issue of financial sustainability — particularly around hospital funding — total government spending has barely changed as a proportion of the overall Ontario economy since the Harris/Eves government left office.

Included in the overall health figures is the health promotion budget, which includes such non-traditional items as \$2 million for the 2009 World Junior Hockey Championships.

Health promotion also funds community rinks and sports complexes.

Other highlights:

- Expansion of the \$135 million wait times strategy to include pediatric surgeries
- \$43 million in a controversial program to give every graduate nurse a full-time job
- Expand the number of Community Health Centres from 54 to 76 by 2008
- \$7 million to expand addictions programs
- \$64 million more for the e-health strategy
- Net expenditure increase for the hospital sector is 5 per cent, or \$835 million
- 150 Family Health Teams expected to be operational by 2008
- 3 new childhood vaccines are being funded

## Muskoka Algonquin suspends activists

Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare claims it wants to maintain its lab services, but doesn't want union members saying as much.

The hospital has taken an aggressive approach to union members, suspending two OPSEU activists campaigning to stop the transfer of lab work out of the region. The suspensions, one short, one indefinite, are without pay.

It has also placed letters of discipline in member files for wearing t-shirts that state: "Our Lab Gets Results, Don't Drive It Away."

The union has charged the hospital with unfair labour practices. An April 24 meeting with a board labour relations officer is scheduled to take place in Barrie.

## Durham rallies to fight cuts to Lakeridge Health

About 130 people came out to a March 20 Oshawa forum to speak out against cuts to mental health and addictions at Lakeridge Health. The cuts represent \$2.6 million of \$8 million the hospital needs to balance its budget. OPSEU president Leah Casselman said the cuts would not save money, but transfer the cost to police, emergency services, acute care facilities, homeless agencies and other social service providers — none of whom are receiving extra funding. "Jails fill up nightly with people brought in off the street who are not really criminals, but who are mentally ill," she said. "Most are let go within a day or two, where they return to the street and start the process all over again." Paul McGary, director of mental health at Lakeridge's Pinewood Centre, said they were already providing most of their services in the community, not out of the central hospital. He questioned whether the province even understood the nature of the cuts they were directing. While the province recently gave Lakeridge \$8 million to cut its deficit in half, the grant appears token compared to the \$80.8 million in new funding it announced to two London-area hospitals February 22.