

# dialogue

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

**Broader Public Service (BPS)  
Conference**  
**Building Stronger Sectors**  
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25

## Transition to community a failure

OPSEU President Thomas speaks at mental health Forums in Kingston, London and Thunder Bay

The transition to community mental health has been a complete failure for the mentally ill who now roam our streets, end up in jail or in homeless shelters, says OPSEU President Warren (Smokey) Thomas.

Thomas spoke at mental health forums in London, Kingston and Thunder Bay May 7-12. Organized by OPSEU for Mental Health Week, all three cities had a lengthy list of complaints. They include lack of supportive and affordable housing, insufficient hospital resources, vulnerable inpatient programs, and lack of community services. The forums also highlighted the failure of the Mental Health Act to protect the chronically mentally ill.

In London, St. Joseph's Regional Mental Health Care recently laid off 29 Registered Practical Nurses despite a significant bail-out by the province. Last year, the hospital could not account for \$14 million given to it in 2003 for harmonization of wages. Thomas is demanding an investigation into the hospital's finances.

In Thunder Bay participants said program closures scheduled for 2011 are causing great concern when most people with mental illness already face difficulties accessing services in that city.

In Kingston, police reported that inpatient mental health beds are always full. The shortages in Eastern Ontario were recently highlighted by a *Toronto Star* series on actor Tony Rosato, who

spent the last two years awaiting trial at the maximum-security Quinte Detention Centre instead of receiving treatment at a mental health hospital. The per diem cost of keeping someone in jail is about \$150 dollars compared to \$450-800 for a hospital bed.

"The government cannot expect to quietly continue the practice of saving money on the backs of a vulnerable group," says Thomas. "There needs to be a comprehensive strategy to make community mental health work."

October 10 is both election-day and World Mental Health Day. Concerned citizens are urged to hold all candidates meetings in their communities to demand for urgent changes to mental health delivery.

## Campaign takes aim at Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare

Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is coming under fire after dismissing a popular OPSEU steward over her fight to preserve local lab testing. OPSEU has begun a series of regional newspaper and radio advertisements this week blasting the hospital for its unfair labour practices. Administrators got an early taste May 22 when an OPSEU picket was set up outside the Barrie Holiday Inn — site of a unfair labour practices mediation. OPSEU 1st Vice-President-Treasurer Patty Rout said "these workers are being punished for their passionate commitment to the work they do... if you want to shut down or privatize health care services, OPSEU members are not going to just shut up and do our jobs."



May 22 Picket in Barrie

## Maybe we should just turn the channel...

CanWest MediaWorks is taking the federal government to court, challenging Canadian rules prohibiting U.S.-style prescription drug advertising. CanWest owns more than 30 television stations and is the largest newspaper publisher in Canada. If CanWest wins, it is anticipated spending on brand name pharmaceuticals could increase by \$10 billion annually in Canada.

## Ontario "Chaoulli" challenge more politics than law

The Chaoulli decision in Quebec is unlikely to repeat in Ontario, despite the latest charter challenge launched May 2 by the Alberta-based Canadian Constitution Foundation. The 2005 Chaoulli decision opens up Quebec to private two-tier health insurance based on the Quebec Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. Barely passing by a 4-3 decision of Canada's highest court, only three of the four judges felt delays in the public health care system also violated the right to life and security of the person protected under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. University of Ottawa Legal expert Martha Jackman said the latest challenge was based more on privatization politics than law.