

dialogue

December 13, 2007

A bi-weekly update on issues
affecting health care in Ontario**Season's Greetings**
Next edition: January 10, 2008

Study links nursing home violence to working conditions

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A new study of violence against personal support workers in nursing homes concludes both verbal and physical violence is directly linked to working conditions.

The study, released Nov. 20 by York and Carleton Universities, says 43 per cent of personal support workers reported of daily physical violence, including hitting with a hand or object, scratching, pinching, biting, grabbing, pulling hair, twisting wrists, poking, spitting, and throwing objects. A further 23.1 per cent say they experience such violence on a weekly basis.

The report says while workers' compensation claims have increased tenfold over the last decade, the vast majority of violence goes unreported, workers reluctant to undergo the paperwork involved unless injured. Workers are also frustrated that reports of violence receive little follow-up

from management, or worse, are blamed on the caregiver.

Daily care activities are where most violent incidents occur, often involving intimate acts and the invasion of personal space. The authors warn that if such care is rushed or forced, they may leave residents feeling threatened, endangered, fearful or overwhelmed – conditions that leave them prone to retaliate violently.

The study surveyed workers in 81 unionized long term care workplaces in Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia between January and August 2006. Almost half of the workers surveyed complained of working short-staffed on a daily basis, while a further third reported working short-staffed on a weekly basis. 60.3 per cent say there is too much to do all or most of the time.

The authors say the violence could be diminished with opportunities for relationship building, such as socializing, sharing coffee, watching TV or eating with the residents – something workers claim to have almost no time to do.

The report also criticizes the lack of sufficient training to deal with residents with cognitive impairments such as dementia and Alzheimers. Workers are frequently expected to give up break times and lunches to receive what little training nursing homes do have to offer.

The Ontario government has engaged St. Elizabeth Healthcare CEO Shirley Sharkey to conduct a review into staffing standards for the province's nursing homes. Initially expected to be complete by the end of the year, Ms. Sharkey is not expected to issue an interim report until February, delaying implementation.

Hamilton VON disqualified from bidding, layoffs expected

After 107 years of service to the community, the Victorian Order of Nurses were told Tuesday they were disqualified from the tendering process that will decide home care nursing services in the Hamilton region. No reasons were given.

About 100 VON nursing and administrative staff will be without a job next April, many after lengthy careers delivering home care to patients in the Hamilton region. VON Hamilton recently was given the Hamilton Spectator Gold Reader's Choice Award in the home healthcare category.

VON is the second agency to find out its services were no longer wanted this week. On Monday St. Joseph's Home Care was told they were similarly disqualified. Together the two largest not-for-profit agencies in the region provide about 80 per cent of home nursing care in the region.

"Health minister George Smitherman has delivered a lump of coal into the stocking of almost every home care nurse and patient in the Hamilton area," says OPSEU President Warren (Smokey) Thomas, which represents the VON workers.

Hamilton home care patients will likely experience disruption to their care during the changeover. In Niagara, where the VON lost the home care contract in 2004, winning agencies struggled to hire enough staff, leaving many patients in a precarious position.

The agencies are among the first in the province to lose home care work as the three-year moratorium on competitive bidding was recently lifted.

VON workers were told the news at a meeting Wednesday morning.

Arriving Next Week

2008 Health Care Divisional Council Pocket Planners

Next week the 2008 Health Care Divisional Council Pocket Planners will be arriving mid-week at your regional office. Please contact your office to arrange to get sufficient copies for your local membership.

The Pocket Planners have more health care dates than last year's calendar. It's a great way for members to carry OPSEU with them year-round.



IN BRIEF

Gélinas replaces Martel as NDP Health Critic, Safdie slams hospital P3s

NDP MPP **France Gélinas** not only succeeds **Shelley Martel** as the member for Nickel Belt, but also takes up Martel's former post as critic for health and long term care. Gélinas is no stranger to health care politics — she is a physiotherapist who recently served as President of the Association of Ontario Health Centres. **Elizabeth Witmer** returns as the Tory critic for health and long term care ... **Shelly Jamieson** has been appointed cabinet secretary, the second most powerful position in provincial government. Jamieson is former President of Extendicare, the largest private for-profit chain of nursing homes ... The **OPSEU Canadian Blood Services** sector met in Toronto Dec. 7 to discuss their upcoming bargaining strategy. In the last round in 2005, CBS was successful in using a coordinated bargaining strategy to achieve their goals Famed architect **Moshe Safdie** recently withdrew from a Montreal public-private partnership hospital project, claiming such deals are "highly problematic." Safdie told

the *Montreal Gazette* "It's the nature of the beast when you do a PPP. You can call it cutting corners. The objective of the private developer, in order to win this project, is to produce the cheapest possible solution. My experience is that the PPP process is not going to lead to either innovation or anything outside the box, other than the minimal interpretation of the written specifications."... 1,500 marchers rallied at the **Brampton Civic Hospital** Dec. 9 to protest unacceptable delays in the ER. The Brampton Civic was one of two initial P3 projects proposed by the Ernie Eves government, and later approved by the McGuinty government. George Smitherman told the legislature that an investigator is on site looking at two recent high-profile deaths. Smitherman also revealed that a supervisor has been appointed to provide oversight ... The cost of the Brampton Civic Hospital just keeps on rising. Originally estimated at \$350 million, the P3 rose to \$550 million, then the hospital reported costs to be \$790 million (including land and

technology) and on Dec. 6 the Minister of Health told the legislature the cost was \$900 million. Just how much technology does the new hospital have? An MRI scanner can typically cost from \$1.2 to \$3 million. With more than \$300 million the government is now claiming in technology costs, the Brampton Hospital could easily afford the equivalent of 100 such machines if reports are true....A Dec. 6 arbitration award at **Lakeridge Health** replaces an outdated uniform allowance for hoovers with \$75 for the purchase of scrubs for each bargaining unit member. The amount will be prorated for part-time staff... The coroner's jury investigating the Nov. 2005 death of Windsor nurse **Lori Dupont** is recommending hospital employees be better educated on domestic violence. The jury also asked the government to examine whether domestic violence belongs in the Occupational Health and Safety Act.