



Health Care Links

A newsletter for OPSEU
stewards working in health care

Issue #6 February 2004

Bill 8: Liberal government wants to give itself special powers in health care

Bill 8, the so-called *Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act*, was introduced in the autumn as to fulfil the Liberal promise to enshrine the Canada Health Act (CHA) in Ontario law, create a Health Quality Council to monitor and provide accountability, and ban two-tier health care.

As it stands, the Bill includes nothing to further the principles of the CHA; does not improve democracy, transparency or accountability; and does not stop more erosion of Medicare, the

privatization, profit-taking and two-tiering for uninsured services.

It also opens the possibility of extra-billing through the regulations and allows block fees by physicians. The Bill gives the Minister of Health sweeping powers to order restructuring of the health system without making clear his intent and without any democratic control, input or checks.

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Health and Safety, Privatization, Workload campaigns

The six health care division executives met Jan. 14, 2004 to set priorities for the health council. Members decided the top three priority issues that were common to all sectors were Health and Safety, Privatization, and Workload.

Health and Safety: Sharps – don't get stuck with them — Safety in the workplace is everyone's concern. Many injuries with sharps could easily be prevented. Every health care worker needs to take action to prevent injury from sharps. We are taking action. We are trying to develop language for a mandatory article for each and every Collective Agreement around sharps. A resolution is coming forward at Convention and we urge you all to support it. We are worth it!

SARS – OPSEU played a leading role in ensuring hospitals protected workers during the SARS outbreaks in 2003. We are continuing that

role by ensuring that the SARS enquiry hears from front-line OPSEU members and not just nurses and doctors. Lisa McCaskell, OPSEU's health and safety officer, met several times with the Commission and was instrumental in getting a special hearing on health and safety issues in November 2003. Please check the web site at: http://www.sarscommission.ca/hearings/pdf/OPSEU_ONA.pdf for more details.

Privatization: Stop the drive to privatize Privatization is proceeding, by stealth in many cases, and threatens patient care in all sectors. OPSEU is fighting the private P3 (so-called public-private partnerships) hospitals — along with our partners CUPE, SEIU and the Ontario Health Coalition — in the courts. Steven Shrybman, lawyer for the unions, says the deals contravene the *Public Hospitals Act*. The unions

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RPN Forum held, committee established

OPSEU represents between 4,000 - 5,000 RPNs throughout Ontario in many different areas of the union including the OPS, and several sectors of the BPS. The RPN forum sponsored by the Health Care Divisional Council was held at the Marriott Hotel in Toronto Oct. 6. RPNs from across the province made recommendations to the council to set up a subcommittee of RPNs to

identify ongoing issues, mobilize campaigns, establish effective communication throughout the province for Registered Practical Nurses, and to spread the word that RPNs are Real Professional Nurses.

The following members were appointed by the council to form such a subcommittee:

Tony Morabito
Chair (Vice-Chair of Health Care Divisional Council)
Local 636
North Bay Psychiatric Hospital

Pamela Oelke
Local 152
St. Joseph's Health Care
London

Allan Nelson
Local 500
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Elly Mudrey
Local 331
Mental Health Centre

Lisa Hovinga
Local 473
St. Francis Memorial Hospital

Fay Green
Local 305
South Muskoka Memorial Hospital

Jill McIlwraith
Local 260
Grey Bruce Health Services

Craig Nesbitt
Local 636
North Bay Psychiatric Hospital

Heather Durant
Local 439
Royal Ottawa Health Care Group

On Jan. 22, 2004 the RPN Committee held its first meeting in Toronto to set goals and plan strategy. Watch for them at Convention, and look for their RPN newsletter in future.

Bill 8 committee hearings from page 1

The Standing Committee on Justice and Social Policy will hold hearings in Sudbury, Ottawa and Windsor Feb. 17-19; in Toronto the week of Feb. 23; and in Niagara Falls Feb. 26.

OPSEU has sought standing at all the hearings and encourages individual members to do the same to speak out against this Bill. For details about the Bill to assist in such a presentation, call Barb Linds at 1-800-268-7376 x 203.

It's too late to request standing for Sudbury, Ottawa and Windsor. To present at the other hearings, contact the Committee Clerk Susan Sourial at: (416) 325-7352 by the deadlines set out here:

* in Toronto, should contact the Committee Clerk by noon on Monday, February 16, 2004.

* in Niagara Falls, should contact the Committee Clerk by noon on Thursday, February 19, 2004.

Those who do not wish to make an oral presentation but who are interested in commenting on the Bill may send written submissions to the Committee Clerk at the address below by noon March 5. You can buy a copy of the Bill from Publications Ontario at 1-800-668-9938, or at 416-326-5300. An electronic version is available on the Legislative Assembly website at: www.ontla.on.ca.

Focus on our six divisions

Hospital Professionals

The HPD held its pre-bargaining conference Feb. 13 and the Central Demand Setting will be May 1-2 in Toronto. OPSEU urges all HPD locals and/or bargaining units to consider participating in Central as this will strengthen our voice across the province. HPD has made some changes to its web site at <http://www.hospitalprofessionals.org> ; visit the site.

Health Care Support

Health Care Support has elected a new executive and has a new Chair, Rose Dawkins, of Local 581, The Scarborough Hospital. The division has a revamped newsletter, "Health Care Support News." The division executive is asking its members to share information on bargaining issues, collective agreements, divestments, and other matters of common interest. The Support Division also participated in the recent RPN forum and shares concerns about Bill 8 (see report above).

Ambulance

Downloading continues to impede our members in their work. The Division has beaten back the "firemedics" challenge in Owen Sound, as the County of Grey looks set to take back the ambulance services and scrap the firemedics proposal. Owen Sound voters turfed out their former mayor who was actively pushing the firemedics model. In London, paramedics at the Thames Valley service are irate after the City of London stepped in to torpedo a deal to give them parity with surrounding regions.

Long Term Care

Long Term Care is putting on a leadership development course for its locals March 5-7 in Orangeville. The Ontario Health Coalition's postcard will be distributed in bulk to all locals in the division. All OPSEU members are being urged to take part and support mandated minimum staffing levels in Ontario long-term care facilities.

Community Health Care Professionals:

The Class action regarding pensions for CCAC employees is proceeding. The second wave of divestment of CCAC therapy groups is causing chaos. We have already filed one application at the Ontario Labour Relations Board for continuing bargaining rights, and claiming the CCAC is a related employer. More are expected. There are two leadership development courses planned: for Regions 1, 2, 5, 6 in May (location to be determined) and for Regions 3, and 4, in October, in Ottawa.

Mental Health

The Mental Health Division has been active. OPSEU First VP/Treasurer (and RPN) Smokey Thomas held a news conference at Queen's Park Feb. 4 to denounce 500 psychiatric bed closures since 1996. The Division moves forward towards its symposium to be held this fall. Meanwhile, our members at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Toronto, fight a P3 proposal; London members suffer bed cuts and attacks on our jobs, and mental health workers in Brockville stare down a possible closure of their facility.

OPSEU in new NUPGE health body

The new Canadian Health Professionals Secretariat (CHPS) includes unions across the country that represent health care professionals and deals specifically with professionals' issues. It meets twice a year to discuss and strategize on common issues related to bargaining and public policy. This allows participants to share and learn from each others' experience and to promote common action. The next meeting will be held in Ottawa Feb. 26-27. OPSEU is represented by Patty Rout, Sue McSheffrey, and Chris Madill (OPSEU Region 2 Vice-President).

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are fighting the government for disclosure of documents on the P3 deals.

The Royal Ottawa Hospital in Ottawa, (an OPSEU workplace), and the William Osler Health Centre in Brampton (not OPSEU) are the first hospitals slated to be sold and rebuilt by private owners. The Ministry has recently given approval to nine other hospitals (including several OPSEU workplaces) to investigate the P3 model.

Ontario Health Coalition activities

Promises, promises....In the lead-up to the election, the Liberals made a lot of health care promises, including opposing the Americanization and creeping privatization of hospitals. They promised more openness and transparency, and said they would stop the privatization of MRIs, CTs, and stop the creation of P3 hospitals. Their actions to date don't measure up to these promises. The OHC believes urgent action is needed to keep the pressure on the government.

OHC Action Plan: The OHC brought together activists from across the province Nov. 22, 2003, to develop an action plan. Key areas of attention include: Home care, long-term care, P3s, MRI-CTs, and mental health. Actions include mass lobbies, postcards, local campaigns, cross-province tours, and ongoing participation in legal challenges.

Get active! It's the local coalitions that will implement this plan. The Health Care Divisional Council continues to urge OPSEU members to become active in their local health coalitions. There are 48 coalitions across the province. OPSEU is active in many of these such as Renfrew, Kingston, Guelph, Kenora, Peterborough, London, North Bay, Durham, Timmins. Your action now will have a huge impact on the future of health care.

Please see <http://www.web.net/ohc/> for details on all the OHC's activities.

Authorized for distribution, Leah Casselman, President

“Evidence from the privatization of hospitals in the UK shows there are often cuts to services for patients, deteriorating working conditions, seriously flawed facilities, and costs for taxpayers that are 2-3 times more than for hospitals built in the traditional way,” says Marlene Rivier, President of OPSEU Local 479 at the ROH.

Workload: Dying to make a living The HCDC is planning a campaign on workload issues. We need to hear about shortages in your workplace. Workload issues affect all six divisions of healthcare. The casualization of jobs and multi-site problems contribute to the workload problem. Please contact your division executive with details of any local workload issues you may be aware of.

Watch for more information at Convention April 15-17.

HEALTH CARE DIVISIONAL COUNCIL DIVISION CHAIRS 2003 - 2005

Chair: Patty Rout
Lakeridge Health Corporation, Local 348
Hospital Professionals Division

Vice Chair: Tony Morabito,
North Bay Psychiatric Hospital, Local 636
Mental Health Division

Secretary: Sue McSheffrey
CCAC in Renfrew County, Local 481
Community Health Care Professionals Division

Jamie Ramage
City of Hamilton, Local 256
Ambulance Division

Debbie MacDonald
Sherwood Park Manor, Brockville, Local 439
Long Term Care & Related Facilities Division

Jill McIlwraith
Grey Bruce Health Centre, Local 260
Health Care Support Division

This newsletter from the Health Care Divisional Council (HCDC) is sent to local presidents and stewards in the health care sectors, and posted on the web at www.opseu.org Click on "Health Care" under BPS sectors. **Please post** the newsletter on your union bulletin board and share it with your colleagues. Let us know what you'd like to hear about. Send e-mails to us through the link on the HCDC web page.