

DRAFT RELEASE

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OPSEU confronts Smitherman at Centre for Addiction and Mental Health: "There's more to health care than doctors and nurses"

TORONTO – Hiring more nurses is great, but not when it comes at the expense of the health care system as a whole, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union told Health Minister George Smitherman today.

Smitherman was at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) today to launch nursing week, but OPSEU's Nancy Pridham warned him that hospitals should not be laying off non-nursing staff in order to fund more nursing positions.

"It is a complete insult to have Smitherman at the Centre, when the hospital is laying off clinical staff," Pridham, vice-president of the OPSEU Local at CAMH said. "Twenty-one clinical psychologists, case managers, stress management therapists, administrative secretaries and others have been laid off. The Centre has arbitrarily eliminated another 21 positions without advising us."

"In other departments, nurses are replacing former OPSEU positions which have been realized through attrition. If a social worker, occupational therapist or case manager retires, they are replaced by a nurse. We all have a role to play on the health care team. But this hospital has laid off clinical staff and is reducing staff in other areas to meet the government's commitments on nurses. The employer tells us it only has funds to hire nurses."

Pridham said Smitherman told her the hospital was "passing the buck" and that his instructions to hire nurses is supposed to include RPNs. "This minister should know by now that there is more to health care than just doctors and nurses, important as these professionals are."

OPSEU represents 1700 non-nursing professionals at CAMH.

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