



Voice of REASON

Frontline
News & Views
from OPSEU's
Mental Health
Division

JULY 2006

Whitby and North Bay mental health divestments a huge vote of confidence in OPSEU

Both North Bay Psychiatric Hospital, Local 636, and Whitby Mental Health Centre, Local 331, were divested over the past year and both locals spoke overwhelmingly in favour of remaining with OPSEU.

North Bay Psychiatric Hospital was divested to the North East Mental Health Centre, (NEMHC), Nov. 21, 2005. Whitby Mental Health Centre, was divested March 27, 2006.

What is the division up to?

Mental Health Division is actively involved in the LHINS campaign all of the health care unions are working together on. Check www.protecthealthcare.ca We are also supporting the Ontario Health Coalition and local health coalition to "stop P3s." We are also working with the OPS on the OPTrust campaign.

Despite the lack of successor rights for workers in the Ontario Public Service, both the Whitby and North Bay psychiatric hospital divestments were successful for OPSEU. In a card-signing drive, the union signed about 98 per cent of all members at the two locals — about 1,600 members in all. The Broader Public Service (BPS) welcomes these members.

The big issue for OPSEU members at both Whitby and North Bay was holding on to their pension plan, OPTrust.

With such a high total of cards signed for OPSEU, North Bay and Whitby both divested with voluntary recognition agreements, giving members ongoing OPSEU representation, and allowing current members to maintain their OPT membership. This was a positive step for all members and a huge vote of confidence in OPSEU.

There is one provincially-operated (OPS) psychiatric

hospital left in Ontario, Penetang Regional Mental Health Centre, and the Oakridge Division. We still don't know the planned divestment date for Penetang.

Bargaining begins

Local 636 is now bargaining with NEMHC. "Bargaining is going at a snail's pace, as the employer is dragging its feet in scheduling more dates," said Tony Morabito, local president.

The changes are not done at North Bay: There will be ongoing program divestment and program transfers over the next few years. A new hospital will also be built in North Bay.

In Whitby, Local 331 has elected its first bargaining team and members have completed a bargaining survey. "We've had a lot of interest from our members in bargaining," said Local President Joan Gates.

Health and Safety update

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health members have used the Occupational Health and Safety Act to stop the placement of forensic patients in non-forensic wards where staff are not trained in supervising and treating these clients.

Geoff McPhee is looking to connect with the co-chairs of the Health and Safety Committees. He wants to develop a network to share resources, please contact him directly at:

opseunorthbay@bellnet.ca

Division dues

Bill Playter, our treasurer, reminds everyone to get their dues paid. Your local must be paid up in full to vote at the next BPS meeting.

At the last BPS, the division voted to decrease our dues to \$1 per member in mental health work per year. If you have questions about how this applies to you, please contact Bill or any member of the Executive.

Smoke Free Ontario

The new anti-smoking legislation came into effect May 31, 2006. Every OPSEU member is entitled to a smoke-free workplace. Remember wherever you are working is your work environment. Whether outside with a client, or in a client's home, you are working and you are legally entitled to a smoke-free work environment.

LHINs: Government still "planning to plan"

The government of Ontario has passed *Bill 36*, and LHINs are now going ahead legally. Most Local Health Integration Networks are spending the summer consulting on a draft regional strategic plan, due at the end of October.

The strategic plans should give the first indication of the direction regional health care is likely to take. These plans are to be made public and posted on the web sites of each of the 14 LHINs.

All the LHINs have recently made the remaining appointments to their nine-member boards. For the latest news on LHIN personnel in

your area check out the Ministry of Health web site: www.health.gov.on.ca/english/public/legislation/lhins/hu_lhins.html

The LHINs have a mandate to continually seek integration opportunities including forced mergers and transfers of service. The health minister has said health services will be offered from fewer locations. That could mean jobs and health services leaving your community.

OPSEU has circulated a LHINs Watch sheet. The first side provides questions you might ask at a community consultation. The second side is a feedback form on the meeting. Please use this to help us keep track of what is happening and to share information. For more information e-mail Rick Janson rjanson@opseu.org.

Three-year hospital funding

On June 2 the provincial government announced three-year funding for each of the province's hospitals to 2009. In doing so, the province may have taken away the ability of the LHINs to make their own regional funding decisions. The LHINs are to take on responsibility for regional funding in 2007.

News Briefs

News from across Ontario

Local 431, Providence Continuing Care Centre Mental Health Services, has been having some fun at the employer's expense. The hospital is stalling contract talks so Local 431 members showed up at the hospital's board of governors meeting in May to greet the governors going into their meeting.

Local 152, St. Joseph's Health Care in London and St. Thomas held information pickets in Windsor and London to protest plans to transfer the hospital's 11 ACT teams to community agencies. Members are concerned this could jeopardize the specialized mental health services that schizophrenics in communities across southwestern Ontario rely on. The local also held an evening vigil and members wore black arm bands to protest the threat of layoffs at St. Joseph's despite the fact its mental health care budget has a surplus.

Locals 307 and 329 have merged, creating one 950-member local at the **Mental Health Centre Penetanguishene and Oak Ridge**. "We believe this is in the best interest of our members," said Local 329 president Martha McDonald. "This will put us in the best position for divestment."



Despite an early summer downpour, OPSEU activists marched on Queen's Park June 3rd to protest the government's reckless new program of privatized infrastructure. Under the plan, 29 new hospital projects will be designed, built, financed and operated by the private sector. Eleven of these are planned to start this year.

Public-Private Partnerships (P3s) have been proven to cost more and deliver less. Several mental health facilities have been slated for P3 projects. (photo: Jay Jackson)

Mental Health Centre Penetanguishene is the last psychiatric hospital still directly operated by the provincial government. No date for divestment has been given.

OPSEU wins disclosure

Local 152 has won a victory for disclosure in a recent arbitration award for the nurses' bargaining unit. The arbitrator ordered **St. Joseph's Health Care** to disclose "current rationalization plans" and negotiate a Human Resources Adjustment Plan covering nurses with OPSEU .

OPSEU not consulted on transfer

A group of hand-picked representatives of hospitals and community agencies has been consulted by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care about the transfer of so-called 'non-bedded' mental health services from psychiatric hospitals to community agencies. OPSEU, representing more than 5,000 members in mental health care, was never consulted. The Tier 3 Provincial Working Group was slated this month to submit its recommendations to the

Mental Health Division: News briefs from our locals (continued)

Deputy Minister. OPSEU has filed a Freedom of Information request to get a copy of the Provincial Working Group's report.

New beds

Health Minister George Smitherman announced 75 new forensic beds in April, after a number of groups including OPSEU lobbied for more beds, . The beds are expected to go to the **Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, St. Joseph's**

Health Care St. Thomas, Royal Ottawa Hospital and Mental Health Centre Penetanguishene. At **Oak Ridge**, a new 20-bed maximum security unit will be set up, creating about 40 new jobs.

Useful web sites

Stay informed:

Bookmark these sites!

For all OPSEU news:

www.opseu.org

For news of national interest:

www.nupge.ca

For news in our sector:

<http://www.opseu.org/bps/health/mentalindex.htm>

All OPSEU health care workers:

www.opseu.org/bps/health/splash.htm

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