

November 1, 2006

Ontario Legislature – Members' questions:

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Ms. Shelley Martel (Nickel Belt): My question is to the Premier. A confidential report done by Deloitte for the Ministry of Health shows that aggressive cuts have been made to in-patient mental health beds for people with serious mental illness. At London's St. Joseph's hospital, for example, the number of beds for people with an addiction and mental illness was dramatically cut by 55%, from 28 beds down to 12. At the same time, as the report makes clear, there is a serious lack of community-based mental health services, including supportive housing to help these individuals in the community.

Premier, how is it that in-patient mental health beds can be cut when the community services aren't in place to support these individuals?

Hon. Dalton McGuinty (Premier, Minister of Research and Innovation): I'm always grateful for the question. I know that the member opposite will know already that we've invested over 200 million new dollars in community mental health services. Those were the first investments in community mental health in Ontario in over 12 years. What it means for people, though, of course, is that 113,800 more Ontarians are now able to access mental health services in their communities. We think there is obviously more to do, but we're very proud of the progress we have made together working with Ontarians.

Ms. Martel: People must wonder where the money went, because the report is very clear that the community services aren't in place to meet the needs of people suffering from mental illness. In Kingston, the report says, there continues to be a need for additional community mental health services to support high-needs clients. In Ottawa, the Royal Ottawa hospital administration said that transitioning patients out of the hospital to the community has not been successful due to a lack of resources. At St. Joseph's Healthcare in Hamilton, the report notes, "There continues to be a challenge in accessing community resources to support the timing of the discharge of patients."

Premier, I ask you again, when will your government finally put in place the supportive housing and specialized long-term-care and treatment programs to really support individuals with mental illness in the community?

Hon. Mr. McGuinty: You know, the record is always important in these matters. In 1992, the NDP cut mental health funding by \$23 million. But there's more: In 1994, they cut mental health funding by \$42.4 million.

Again, in our first three years we invested over \$200 million more in community mental health services. In terms of some local numbers: in London alone, \$17.3 million more to the Erie St. Clair and South West local health integration networks; \$5.4 million more for mental health in Middlesex; \$6.2 million more with the increase in Leeds-Grenville, Frontenac and Lennox and Addington counties.

So, yes, there is more work to be done, but the fact of the matter is that we continue to make progress on the ground, where it counts.