



# The Voice of Reason

Frontline news and views from OPSEU's Mental Health Division  
Winter 2004

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## What is the Division up to?

The Mental Health Division is once again leading the charge to review where mental health services are in this province. A proposal is going to the OPSEU Executive Board in March to host a symposium in late October that will have union leaders, members consumers, providers and government representatives in the same room discussing what is happening with mental health in Ontario today.

The details have not been worked out yet, so please watch your mailbox. This symposium is a follow up to "Reality Ontario's Mental Health Care System isn't Working".

"Reality" is a review of the current state of Mental Health Care in Ontario from the point of the people who work in the system. The symposium will bring together all the aspects of the system and identify ways to make the Mental Health System work in this province.

### Where are they now, the PPHs?

- North Bay Psychiatric Hospital – to be divested to a newly formed Mental Health Authority. No dates announced yet.
- Whitby Mental Health Centre – big question – it will be divested eventually, no dates; no firm details.
- Mental Health Centre Penetang – to be divested, who knows to who or when.
- Oakridge – going to be rebuilt, or at least the plans are done, is it going to be divested? Probably.
- London Psychiatric Hospital, St. Thomas Psychiatric Hospital. Divested to St. Joseph's Health Care, now known as Regional Mental Health Care London and St. Thomas. The two OPSEU locals have been amalgamated into one local.
- Lakehead Psychiatric Hospital: The latest divestment, June 22/03 to St. Joseph's Health Care Group – Thunder Bay.

- Hamilton – Now St. Joseph's on the Mountain.
- Brockville – Divested to the Royal Ottawa Health Care group – working on a collective agreement since fall 2000.
- Kingston – Divested to Providence Continuing Care Centre – now known as Providence Continuing Care Centre – Mental Health Services.

Since the provincial election the government has not confirmed that the HSRC recommendations regarding these hospitals will be followed or not.

### A message from the treasurer

Division dues are due Jan. 1 of each year. Please forward your local's dues to Bill Playter at 690 Victoria St. Midland, On, L4R 1B1. Thanks!

## Membership matters

by Odilia B. Gouveia, Membership Secretary

I have worked as a social worker for Regional Mental Health center – London (former London Psychiatric Hospital) since 1991 and have during the course of this time been an active steward for Local 152. My involvement at both the local and Divisional levels has been quite rewarding and invigorating and I look forward to working with the executive to further advance the aims and goals of the Division.

At the BPS Conference last June, members identified the need for the Division to reach out to Sector 18 locals and units. Thus, I encourage the sector's locals and units to become members of the Mental Health Division and keep the executive up to date on mental health issues/concerns/ problems affecting your communities.

## Common scents can hurt you by Geoffrey McPhee, Health and Safety

We are all living in a time when chemicals play a very prominent role in all aspects of our lives. There are chemicals in the food we eat; we put chemicals on our lawns, in our swimming pools, in our drinking water and we routinely clean our homes using a wide variety of chemicals.

We use a large number of scented products on our bodies such as aftershave, perfume, scented hair products and scented cosmetics, lotions, powders and soaps. What you may not know is that nearly one-third of the chemical additives used in perfumes and other scented products are known to be toxic. And it's not safe to assume that the other chemicals are safe just because they aren't known to be toxic.

We all have a friend, relative, or co-worker who may become very ill if exposed to scented

products. Probably several of your co-workers in your facility that may be harmed by exposure to common products such as perfume, aftershave and hairspray to name just a few.

It's understandable that you may feel puzzled, annoyed, hurt, intimidated or even vaguely insulted by a request to leave off the scented stuff when you're going to be around a certain person or going to be in a certain space.

Most misunderstandings about this subject arise from two common misconceptions 1) that the no fragrance request is somehow about you as a person and 2) that the request is about smells as such.

But in fact it's all about chemicals.

Knowing that the problem with scented products is the chemicals they contain may help

you understand that a request to avoid such products is not a statement about you.

When around someone who's wearing a scented product or who's wearing clothes that have picked up smells from past use of scented products, certain individuals will develop obvious allergy symptoms (sneezing, coughing, watery eyes). They may have an asthma attack, experience headaches, become dizzy and may even have a seizure or lose consciousness.

I would ask that if you are asked to refrain from wearing scented products in specific areas or around specific individuals, that you respect this request. And please remember that it's not about you. It's about the chemical.

Yes, this problem is for real, and it's becoming widespread.

## A conversation with John Gerretsen, Kingston MPP and Minister of Municipal Affairs and Seniors by Sheryl Ferguson, Communications

*Recently I had the opportunity to sit down and talk to John Gerretsen, MPP. I had a long list of things I wanted to ask him, unfortunately I didn't have time to ask everything I wanted to:*

**Q:** Health Care Restructuring Commission Directives. What's happening?

**A:** I guess that here in Kingston we will see St. Mary's of the Lake move out to the mental health site (former Kingston Psychiatric Hospital). The directives will be reviewed, the emphasis should be on Primary health reform. The Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) mandate needs to be reviewed and have a focus on keeping people in their homes not in hospitals and care centers.

**Q:** ODSP – Will the entitlement go up? Will the eligibility criteria changed?

**A:** There was never a change in the law, the regulations are under review and the criteria is a part of the review. The entitlement will be going up. I don't know when but it will be going up.

**Q:** Homelessness – will there be more money for rent geared-to-income housing?

**A:** Yes. We will be signing onto the Federal government's housing program, there will be more money available to build units. I believe that scattered units is the way to go; we need more units for special needs people.

*(Continued page 3)*

# Message from the Chair

by Tony Morabito

First, I want to welcome all returning executive members of the Mental Health Division. I also want to thank Bob Arnold and Barry Newman for the 18 months of hard work and dedication as executive members of the Division. I would like to welcome Bill Playter and Jackie Smythe who are newly elected as Treasurer and First Alternate, both bring a wealth of experience to their position and we all look forward to working with both executive members.

Our hope is to put out a regular newsletter to members of the Mental Health Division. This way we can keep everyone informed of new updates or events that may be occurring in our division. If you or any individual would like to be added to a communication list of the Mental Health Division please send me your email and I will add you to my list. At the last BPS Conference members who were interested in communicating with us started up a list of

communicators and it seems to be working. So, don't wait. Send me your e-mail address so you can start receiving information to distribute to your members. My email is [morbo@cogeco.ca](mailto:morbo@cogeco.ca).

Our division had our first meeting of the year Oct. 8-9 with the newly formed executives. I must say that it was a lengthy meeting that was very productive. We are working on some new projects that I feel are going to put Mental Health on the forefront of this government. We did decide to dedicate a full day at our next Mental Health Division meeting to do a workshop on collective bargaining. We feel as an executive this is an important piece that we need to work together so that in the future we can negotiate better contracts for all of us. We also discuss the possibility of setting up a meeting with Mr. Smitherman the new Minister of Health and Long Term Care.

Now that we have a newly elected government, more than ever we have to promote our agenda. We must send a clear message to the Liberals that the mental health sector needs the attention and the appropriate funding that the Tories took away during their eight years of government. This is an opportunity to establish a working relationship with this government, not going to war like the pervious eight years that we had to endure.

I would encourage each of you to keep informed. Our lines are always open. Please feel free to send suggestions, concerns and ideas or if you just want to talk to us about the issues we are always available. Please visit the OPSEU web site at:

[www.opseu.org/bps/health/mental/index.htm](http://www.opseu.org/bps/health/mental/index.htm) for updates and information that may be coming out. You will also see a list of numbers and emails of the executive members under the Mental Health Division section.

## Conversation with Gerretsen (continued from page 2)

**Q:** Nursing homes in this province have had the standards of care decreased. Will this be changing?

**A:** Yes. There is a budget issue, long term care standards need to be reviewed and increased

**Q:** The province has no regulations to govern boarding homes and retirement homes. Will there be regulations introduced to address this?

**A:** Yes, the industry is asking for it.

**Q:** Will the remaining provincial psychiatric hospitals be divested?

**A:** This is under review, the community needs to be ready for the people to go to. I was encouraged by the answers I got, the government is reviewing what is still to come to mental health in Ontario. We need to keep lobbying and reminding them that we need quality regulated services provided by our members to meet the needs of the clients.

## Rebuilding mental health services in Ontario

The Mental Health Division Executive encourages members to get involved in the union's campaign to restore taxes to rebuild public services. The government has a revenue problem, not a spending problem.

The Tories cut everything that it was possible to cut. They slashed government spending from 15.4 per cent of gross domestic product to 11.8 per cent. The Tories cut water inspectors. They laid off meat inspectors. They cut key programs down to the bone.

Tax cuts introduced by the Tories will take \$13.3 billion out of revenues for 2003-04. That's more than it costs to run our hospitals (\$10.5 billion), and more than twice the deficit that the Liberals inherited from the Tories (\$5.6 billion).

As public sector employees, we carried the burden for these cuts. Thanks to inflation and frozen budgets, our wages are lower today than 10 years ago.

The Liberal government has floated the idea that we should sacrifice again. President Leah Casselman has told Premier McGuinty that public employees are willing to pay our fair share through taxes to rebuild public services, but not at the bargaining table.

Restoring taxes is the only way to give Ontarians the opportunity to help rebuild public services. A three per cent increase in personal and corporate taxes would generate \$2.1 billion, half of the projected deficit. It would cost less than \$200 per person and half of Ontario taxpayers would pay less than \$90 a year.

The Division Executive attended a one-day lobbying workshop on Jan. 27 on this issue. Visit <http://www.opseu.org/rebuild/index.htm> for more information on the campaign.

## Who we are - Mental Health Division sites

Our members provide mental health care and are employed by provincial psychiatric hospitals, public hospitals and community mental health agencies. The following locals and workplaces are in the Mental Health Division:

**Local 152, St. Joseph's Health Care**

**Local 201, Wellington Psychiatric Outreach Program**

**Local 301, Destiny Manor Treatment Services**

**Local 307, Oak Ridge Division, Penetanguishene Mental Health Centre**

**Local 309, Canadian Mental Health Association, Victoria County**

**Local 329, Penetanguishene Mental Health Centre**

**Local 331, Whitby Mental Health Centre**

**Local 431, Providence Continuing Care Centre - Mental Health Services**

**Local 439, Royal Ottawa Health Care Group - Brockville Psychiatric Hospital**

**Local 441, Leeds & Grenville Rehabilitation and Counselling Services**

**Local 488, Addiction Services of Eastern Ontario**

**Local 500, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health**

**Local 512, Women's Counselling Referral & Education Centre**

**Local 512, Toronto East Counselling Services, Community Housing Support Services**

**Local 548, Parkdale Activity and Recreation Centre**

**Local 636, North Bay Psychiatric Hospital**

**Local 720, Lakehead Psychiatric Hospital**

### Mental Health Division Executive

Chair: **Anthony Morabito**, Local 636

Vice-chair: **Doris Meredith**, Local 720

Secretary: **Marty McFarlane**, Local 431

Treasurer: **Bill Playter**, Local 307

Health and Safety Co-ordinator: **Geoff McPhee**, Local 636

Public Policy and Campaigns: **Dave Erskine**, Local 152

Membership Co-ordinator: **Odilia Gouveia**, Local 152

Communications Co-ordinator: **Sheryl Ferguson**, Local 431

Bargaining Co-ordinator: **Al Donaldson**, Local 307

Authorized for distribution:



Leah Casselman, President