

Fighting for public health care and accountability

Local Health Integration Networks prove to be ‘anything but local’

David Cox



OPSEU First Vice-President/Treasurer Patty Rout leads the march in Ajax, as the community rose up against cuts to the local hospital.

Whether it is paramedics fighting for a fair pension, health unit support workers looking to catch up in wages, or hospital professionals fighting bed cuts, health care workers are engaged in a fight for respect and fairness. At the same time, OPSEU and its allies are working for public access to health care — and public accountability.

And Local Health Integration Networks, the notorious LHINs, are proving to be anything but local.

Members of OPSEU Local 276, office and clerical staff at the Grey Bruce Health Unit, endured a protracted strike, beginning May 1, to make needed gains in wages and benefits (see article, p.4).

In Ajax, the LHIN’s façade of local community consultation crumbled, exposed as anything but local. There wasn’t any consultation — local or otherwise.

The LHIN ran from criticism over proposed cuts to mental health beds at the Ajax-Pickering site of the Rouge Valley Health System — literally.

After cuts to mental health services at Rouge Valley Health System, the LHIN met 73 kilometers away from Ajax in Cobourg in June, to decide on issues affecting Durham Region. The fight against the cuts continues.

“This demonstrates how out of touch this LHIN is with the citizens they are appointed to serve,” President Thomas said.

In Kincardine, OPSEU asked the LHIN to investigate after the physiotherapy clinic at the local hospital was privatized; this sparked community outrage, with a fight-back campaign including an on-line petition and a Facebook group.

In Hamilton, thousands of health care workers and allies came out to a huge rally to protest the contracting out of community care. The powerful message this campaign sent to the government halted competitive bidding province-wide.

In nursing homes, members are fighting for staffing standards that are enforceable, not voluntary, since the private sector dominates the sector.

Ontario now lags behind eight other provinces, and many U.S. states, in its standards of care. Four unions are fighting together for a minimum standard of 3.5 hours of direct care per day.

Governments and hospitals keep trying to carve up public medicare for the private sector, and communities and workers keep fighting back.

Pension fairness for paramedics

Pension fairness is a key issue for 5,000 Ontario paramedics, who lag behind police officers and firefighters when it comes to the retirement benefits they can expect.

Ontario’s paramedics deserve the right to negotiate retirement at age 60 with full pension, a right police and firefighters enjoy, say the four unions who together represent most of these key public safety workers.

The Ontario Municipal Employees Retirement System (OMERS) has so far denied them that right, granted only to police officers and firefighters. As George Orwell might have said, some emergency responders are currently considered ‘more equal than others.’

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