

Ontario Health Coalition

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Attn: Assignment Editor

Hospital Cuts and Privatization Reach New Levels: Coalition Announces “S.O.S.” – Save Our Services – Day of Action

Toronto – At a Queen’s Park press conference this morning, the Ontario Health Coalition, representing more than 400 organizations dedicated to protecting public health care, warned that the Ontario government’s austerity budget is causing unprecedented cuts to and privatization of hospital and health care services. The Ontario government is curtailing health spending by more than \$3 billion, most of which will be shouldered by hospitals and OHIP. Ontario already funds its hospitals at the lowest rate per person of any province in Canada.

The coalition announced plans for a cross-province Day of Action on Monday March 4. Protests will be held across Ontario. The coalition has titled the event “S.O.S. -- Save Our Services” and with the Day of Action it is launching an S.O.S. campaign across Ontario.

The coalition takes issue with the Health Minister’s claims that services are being “transformed” or transferred to home care. This is simply untrue. In many cases, services being cut simply do not exist in home or community care. In other cases, services are being demonstrably privatized to for-profit corporations, despite repeated government promises to the contrary.

The coalition released a new report listing hospital deficits and service cuts across the province and a list of upcoming March 4 Day of Action events. The report and upcoming events are available at www.ontariohealthcoalition.ca.

“Thousands of surgeries are being cut from our local non-profit hospitals to be privatized to for-profit corporations, or they are simply cut. Hundreds of health professionals, nurses and hospital support staff are being cut along with the services they provide,” reports Natalie Mehra, director of the Ontario Health Coalition.

In smaller communities, the cuts range from 10% to almost 50% of existing hospital beds slated to be closed down. In larger cities, deficits in the \$20 - \$40 million dollar range are being reported as hospital funding has been set far below the level required to maintain existing services. Since hospitals are not allowed to run deficits, they are forced to cut needed services to eliminate these deficits.

Joining the press conference were City Councillor Sally Freeman from Quinte West and Vicki McKenna, First Vice-President of the Ontario Nurses’ Association. The deficit at the Quinte hospitals is resulting in plans to close maternity, privatize outpatient physiotherapy, cut almost half the hospital beds in Picton and more than one in every six hospital beds at the Trenton Memorial Hospital. Cuts to registered nurses as a result of the budget deficit now number in the hundreds of positions, commensurate to a cut of thousands of hours of patient care.

““The proposed cuts by the Quinte Health Care Corporation represent the further erosion of the level of health care in the Quinte area,” said Ms. Freeman. “We are demanding a moratorium be placed on cuts to the number of beds and/or level of service provided to our community. Citizens in the Quinte area depend on these services, further cuts cannot be tolerated.”

““The impact of cuts to hospital services as a result of government hospital funding reform means less care provided by fewer registered nurses,” concluded Vicki McKenna. “This is happening at a time when Ontario already has the second-lowest ratio of RNs to population in the country and will result in higher readmission rates and increasing costs.”

For more information: Ontario Health Coalition office 416-441-2502.