

# Ontario Health Coalition

OHC  
NEWSLETTER  
May 2000



## The Pulse

### OHC Coordinator says good-bye

Our Provincial Coordinator, Lynn Simmons, advised the Administrative Committee that she is leaving the OHC and would like to do so by Sept. 1. We expressed our deep appreciation for the depth of contribution Lynn has made to the coalition and the movement to protect Medicare. From policy, research and education work, to organizing rallies and working with the media, Lynn has helped the OHC grow. She will be hard to replace. We're in the process of preparing the job posting. If you haven't received it in your May mailing and want a copy, please phone the office.

### Fantastic organizing in Hamilton saves hospitals

Congratulations to the Hamilton/Wentworth Health Coalition, CUPE L. 794 and the many others who forced the government to stop the planned closures and cuts in that centre. Ministry consultants at Price Waterhouse recommended closing an operating and emergency room, a cardiac care unit and cutting the Henderson's intensive care unit, from 15 to 2 beds. All of this was meant to deal with the Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation's \$40 million deficit. In particular, it looked like it was game over for the Henderson. The community, unions, and opposition parties fought back with a demonstration of 3000, pickets, vigils, marches and more demonstrations. As a result, on April 28<sup>th</sup>, Health Minister Elizabeth Witmer was forced to undermine the authority of the supervisor she herself had appointed and announced that "all four acute-care hospitals in Hamilton will remain open and operating as acute care hospitals." Her guarantee came with a commitment to hand over more cash to Hamilton Health Sciences Corporation to protect the Henderson, McMaster University Medical Centre, Hamilton General and St. Joseph's. Well done, Hamilton!

### "Clear Answers: The Economics & Politics of For-Profit Medicine"

Alberta authors Kevin Taft and Gillian Stewart have put to rest once and for all the case for private health care in Alberta and anywhere else. This is an extremely useful book for anyone who wants to argue for a public, not-for-profit health care system. **If you'd like to order from us, please send \$10 + .50 for mailing. What a bargain!**

### Ontario Medical Association agreement bad news for patients

The new tentative agreement with the Ontario Medical Association means even more out-of-pocket fees for Ontarians. Yet another \$50 million worth of medical services will be delisted from OHIP. Section 13.1 of the agreement reads: "The parties agree that by December 31, 2000 they shall identify changes in the existing Schedule of Benefits which will result in annual savings of at

least \$50 million. This will be accomplished by a mix of tightening and modernization. The process for identifying and making the changes will be agreed upon by the parties." Hearing tests and physiotherapy are among those services that may be chopped or curtailed. Witmer calls this move a "modernization." We call it privatization and more user fees.

## **Ontario Health Budget: Upheaval and destabilization continue**

The Ontario government announced a \$1.4 billion increase for 2000-2001 bringing the total health budget to \$22.279 billion. But last year, total operating and capital spending was actually \$22.230 billion. The increase, therefore is not \$1.4 billion, but \$49 million. There's a big difference!

The lack of money for hospitals, Home Care, and Long Term Care will have serious implications for patients.

Our calls to the Finance Ministry were not returned. Likely, we will have to wait for the Estimates to be tabled before preparing our budget analysis, but here are some crucial questions and concerns:

- \$3.1 billion was allocated to Long Term Care. Last year, \$2.95 billion was spent. That means only \$150 million more has been allocated to this huge sector. These figures suggest to us that not one more cent will be given to Ontario's 43 CCACs. If this is true, chronic patients and those downloaded from hospitals are facing very rough times. Is this money also meant to account for increases in the per diems of long term care facilities? How about the extra 20,000 long term care beds? The outstanding pay equity obligations also appear not to be funded.
- On the hospital side, the \$7.7 billion represents only about \$100 million in new money and falls far short of what is needed to restore quality patient care. Hospital debt stands at \$2.2 billion. Hospital deficits are approximately \$200 million.
- Where is the \$375 million needed annually for the minimal 12,000 Registered Nurses and Registered Practical Nurses? We've heard a lot of rhetoric from the government, but there is no money set aside in this budget. We also desperately need more beds and crucial staff, such as housekeepers, dietary and administrative workers and many, many others to assure quality hospital care.
- No increase in mental health spending has been specified in this budget

These are just some of the areas we'll be researching. Thanks to the great work of Bill Murnigan at the CAW and the Ontario Alternative Budget working group we know we need an infusion of \$2.2 billion just to make up for what's been lost since the Tories came to power. Ontario now leads all provinces on private spending. According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information, Ontarians spent more than \$1000 per person last year out of their own pockets. In fact, private spending per person in Ontario last year was more than \$150 higher than our closest competitor, Alberta. Massive behind-the-scenes regulatory and policy changes and funding cuts have left huge gaps in services and are fuelling privatization.

***What have you had to pay for health care services? Call the Ontario Health Coalition with your stories!***

Have you had to pay out of your own pocket for pharmaceuticals, home care services, medical tests, or for services in hospitals or nursing homes? Have you had to pay for any other health care services or gone without because you could not afford the cost.

If so, we really want to hear from you. You can e-mail (ohc@web.net), fax (416-441-4073) or phone us at (416) 441-3713. We accept collect calls.

### Meeting with Allan Rock

Thanks to all who turned out for our rally at the Health Ministers meeting in Markham March 30. Our delegation got in and met with Federal Health Minister Allan Rock for 45 minutes. We urged the federal government to do the following:

- Take immediate action on Alberta's Bill 11 by introducing emergency legislation prohibiting public funds from being used to deliver for-profit services covered by Medicare and delivered by public hospitals;
- Restore the federal contribution to Medicare to at least 25 per cent (it's at 13% today, down from 50% when Medicare was introduced);
- Ensure full public involvement in federal/provincial decisions on the future of Medicare. We pointed out that the lack of an open and transparent process was alarming, undemocratic and would not produce an outcome that was in the public's interest. Rock said that he supported a public process and public consultation. Further, this consultation would take place before any plan for health care reform was put together and tabled. We'll believe it when we see it! We're waiting for a follow-up meeting and will keep you posted.

### Privatization project dates

The final Public Health/Private Wealth public forums on privatization of Ontario's health care system and its effect on those who need care are as follows: If you live in or near one of these areas, please make sure you attend. We want to hear your stories.

**Sudbury, May 9** (with the OFL) at Sudbury Secondary School, 7 p.m.

**Thunder Bay, June 1**, (with the OFL), 7 p.m. Place to be announced.

**Launch of our publication on Privatization** is tentatively set for the 1<sup>st</sup> week in June. After the publication launch, we'll be preparing 1-hour public education workshops. If want to host one in your community, call our Project Coordinator Michele Lupa at (416) 441-3713.

**Other Ontario Federation of Labour public forum dates:**

**Windsor - May 29**

**Hamilton - June 1**

**St. Catharines - June 5**

**Oshawa - June 6**

Contact Doreen Beath for more information (416) 443-7654/1-800-668-9138.

***Ralph Klein plans to ram through Bill 11 allowing private hospitals.***

***Mike Harris is jumping for joy!***

**The Federal Government is doing nothing**  
**Emergency Demonstration**

**Thurs., May 11**

**12:30 - 1:15 p.m.**

**Liberal Party Headquarters, Toronto**

**10 St. Mary's Street (off Yonge Street, 2 blocks south of Bloor)**

**Defend and fund Medicare. Stop Bill 11! Stop Klein & Harris!**

Call the Ontario Health Coalition 416-441-2502 for more information