

Ontario Health Coalition

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Monday, January 25, 2010

Dr. Andrew McCallum
Chief Coroner for Ontario
26 Grenville St.,
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2G9
Tel: 416-314-4105
Fax: 416-314-4030

Dear Dr. McCallum,

We are writing to call for an inquest into the death of Reilly Anzovino in Welland on December 27, 2009, in support of the family's and the community's requests.

The community is very concerned. Questions have been raised about whether more timely access to blood products and/or oxygen could have prevented Ms. Anzovino's death. From the information that has been disclosed to the community, we believe it is in the public interest that there be a coroner's inquest to investigate and make recommendations resulting from this tragic and untimely death of a young woman.

As you may know, the Fort Erie Emergency Department was closed and converted into an "Urgent Care Centre" in 2009. Though there does not seem to be a clear definition of Urgent Care Centre in Ontario legislation or policy, the community has been informed that CTAS levels I & II patients cannot receive care at the Urgent Care Centre and ambulances have been redirected to the Welland hospital site as a result.

Since ambulances cannot carry blood and at least one report speculates that the ambulance also ran out of oxygen, there is widespread concern in the community that the removal of the emergency department in Fort Erie and lack of timely access to these items are contributing factors in Ms. Anzovino's death.

Prior to the closure of the Emergency Department in Fort Erie, we conducted in-depth interviews with 50 paramedics across Ontario about the proposed and rumoured closures of local Emergency Departments in a number of small, rural and northern hospitals. The paramedics were unanimous in their concerns about the consequences of this policy. Every paramedic expressed concerns about the closures of local emergency departments. Every paramedic we interviewed stated that ambulances cannot replace the functions (including provision of blood for traumas) provided in local hospitals' emergency departments. Every paramedic gave concrete examples of how the plan

to close local Emergency Departments will increase risks for patients, worsen wait times, deprive communities of access to care, or cause poorer care outcomes and even death. Most paramedics reported, from their experience, that the plan to close local emergency departments would lead to new costs for more ambulances, more paramedics and more training requirements. These have not been put in place in any area where the local Emergency Departments are under threat of closure. We released the report publicly in June 2009 and gave copies to health policy advisors in the Health Minister's office and in the Premier's office at that time.

We are concerned that consultant and hospital reports in Niagara have understated the risk to patients posed by removal of local emergency department services. We are further concerned that the remaining emergency departments in Welland and Niagara Falls are so overwhelmed that staffing shortages combined with ambulance offload delays and long waits for patients mean that paramedics cannot receive the hospital support required to provide adequate coverage for the region and patients are facing emergency department wait times that put them at risk.

We hope that your office will conduct an inquest to answer the questions and concerns of the family and the community about public safety and the potential to prevent further deaths in similar circumstances. We believe that it is in the public interest that there be a coroner's inquest to answer the questions and concerns in Niagara, and that this situation conforms with the criteria under which inquests can be called as per Sections 10, 19 and 31 of the Coroner's Act.

We are grateful for your consideration of this request.

Kind Regards,

Natalie Mehra
Director,
Ontario Health Coalition