

Saint John launch event, St. John's press event, Wednesday, Oct 18

By David Robbins

Mike McBane and Linda Silas received a standing ovation from New Brunswick nurses and huge media interest in Saint John at the formal launch of Medicare Works.

Mike and Linda were surrounded by a scrum of 9 reporters from print, TV and radio. Outlets included Broadcast News/CP, the Telegraph Journal, CBC radio and 3 or 4 French media outlets. The Canadian Press issued a wire story that honed in on the idea of the "perfect storm" brewing over health care. So, the alarm is being sounded.

The St. John's press conference that morning attracted the CTV affiliate, radio station VOXM (most listened to station on the Rock), CBC and the Telegram. Great turn-out.

St John's, Thursday, Oct 19

By Kathleen Connors, Canadian Health Coalition (CHC)

Mary Walsh was a "draw" for the public. She was glad to participate. The presence of national speakers was very important to paint the "big picture" for those attending. While the "usual" participants were there, there were ordinary citizens who were present as well. They were the ones who came to the front of the room at the end of the evening, expressed appreciation for the Coalition putting on the Town Hall, thanked the Coalition for continuing to raise the issue of health care, or spoke one-on-one with us because "I was too shy to go to the mike."

The human face of health care will come from the Town Halls and we must record those stories written for use in our lobbying. Lorraine Michael shared the story of the diabetic man who couldn't afford his insulin and supplies and rent, so he is living in his truck. She also shared the story of an elderly woman who was well treated in the hospital but sent home without home care and was struggling with managing on her own.

What the Telegram didn't report was that the woman who asked "what are you going to do for me?" also signed the action sign-up sheet and heard my response to her that the Coalition wants her to be part of a group meeting with her MHA and MP, so she can put the human face to the lobby.

Mike, Linda, and HCNL activists joined CUPE NL on Signal Hill before sunrise to participate in celebrating Tommy Douglas' Birthday this morning.

Halifax media work and Shelburne Town Hall, Thursday, Oct 26

By Michael McBane, Canadian Health Coalition (CHC)

Ian Johnson and I met yesterday morning (Oct. 26) with the Editorial Board of the Halifax Chronicle Herald for an hour. Excellent meeting covered the major themes of our Tour and campaign and left lots of material including a copy of CCPA's Monitor Medicare Special (May 2006) and Parkland's book exposing the myths of private health insurance: "The Bottom Line".

They were interested in our contention that the Harper government appears to be getting ready to 'cut and run' from health care. Our examples included 1) the failure to commit to the National Pharmaceutical Strategy or even show up for the release of its progress report; 2) their burial of the Postl report on how to fix wait times in the public system; and 3) no HHR plan in the federal budget. They were interested in seeing these reports. We then did a one-hour call-in on the Halifax private AM station. The host was sympathetic. Lot's of calls about wait times and the role of for-profit care.

The Shelburne Town Hall was in the new high school and hosted by the Shelburne County Community Health Board. The panel included a local pastor who presented a case study on access that focused on the lack of long-term care in the area. Ian and Debbie gave the provincial context including reference to the NS Health Minister musing about being open for more private health care. A member of the Health Board gave personal stories from Trinidad about how two-tier health care really works. Once the private tier starts, it gets better in direct proportion to the public system getting poorer. Those who can't afford the expensive surgery in the private hospitals die.

A local MLA, a newly elected NDP member, attended together with several municipal officials and most of the Health Board members. The local newspaper, *The Coast Guard*, wrote an excellent story about the Medicare Works Tour.

Charlottetown, Tuesday, Oct 24

By Michael McBane, CHC

Press conference in the afternoon went well – CBC TV News (aired a piece on 6 o'clock news), private radio and the Guardian paper which ran a good story with a photo as well as a photo and quote on the front page top fold: "There are distinct signs of the federal government getting set to cut and run from health care."

The public meeting went very well with an impressive line-up including Dr. John Gillis from Canadian Doctors for Medicare and Dr. Christine Bigsby, a CMA board member and representing the CMA! There was excellent discussion, with 80 people attending, including union leaders, nurses, community activists and a few local politicians. There

were excellent personal stories about how Medicare works and stories from 2 nurses who have work experience in the US describing what it is like working in a for-profit workplace.

The overwhelming theme from the floor was prevention and the social determinants of health, including a powerful intervention on Tommy Douglas' social vision of health and keeping people well in the first place (income, work, housing, food, safe environment). People liked the positive messaging of the Tour.

Edmonton, Monday, Oct 30

By Michael McBane, CHC

The Town Hall event took place on Monday night at the Alberta Teachers' Association's Barnett Hall. Poor weather (snow, ice and cold) led to a smaller than expected turn out – around 45 people. I spoke laying out the federal context (perfect storm etc...). Diane Gibson from Parkland addressed the issues of private insurance and sustainability. What is unsustainable is: a) tax cuts; b) lack of investment in HHR and infrastructure, and c) private health spending. She also critiqued the op ed by Preston Manning in the Edmonton Journal that day making the usual Fraser Institute comparisons to European countries. Private health insurance is not going to improve performance or health outcomes and will drive spending up.

Harvey spoke about the victory in defeating Klein's attempt to adopt his 'Third Way', the significance of Harper's letter to Klein in April, where the Tory candidates stand on health care, and what is happening in regional health authorities. The Calgary Health Authority pays its CEO, Jack Davis, over \$1 million dollars a year and is leading the way in expensive contracts to their friends in for-profit clinics. No public accountability. There are 55 private surgical facilities in Alberta.

Excellent discussion followed including reference to widespread misrepresentation of evidence and ideology (e.g. Manning). Reference was made to the importance of early childhood development, the Tories walking away from child care as contributing to poorer health outcomes than some European countries that invest more than Canada and actually believe in a progressive tax system. Long term care and the neglect of seniors seen as shameful and the Tory government head all the shocking stories and don't seem to care. Nurses spoke about the deliberate slashing of the system in the early 1990's and we have not recovered from that deliberate attempt to sabotage the public system. We can say they have no HHR plan – but in fact they have a plan: starve the public system so the public gives up on it.

As frustrating as it is to have to keep fighting these battles in Alberta – were it not for the successful battles Friends of Medicare fought, U.S. 2-tier health care would be a *fait*

accompli. Final comment from a senior citizen: keep up the fight, and the struggle for more democracy.

Media: one reporter from the St. Albert Gazette.

Red Deer, Media event, Tuesday, Oct 31

By Michael McBane, CHC

Participants in the press conference held at the Public Library in Red Deer were Ken Collier (Council of Canadians), Harvey and myself. Harvey spoke to the provincial Tory leadership debate and where the candidates stand on health care on the 'Third Way'. Jim Dinning was in that day's Edmonton Journal saying: "'It's got to be, and it must remain, a publicly funded health-care system. Albertans said, 'Get the first way right, forget the third way.' " Morton is the hard right candidate pushing private health insurance and for-profit delivery.

Excellent media turn out: CTV & CH TV, Big FM & KG95.8 FM radio and Red Deer Advocate (daily) and Red Deer Express (weekly).

Calgary, Wednesday, Nov 1

By Michael McBane, CHC

The Town Hall meeting took place in the Unitarian church and was organized by the Council of Canadians and Friends of Medicare in Calgary. The panel consisted of Paul Moist, President of CUPE, Diana Gibson of Parkland, Avalon Roberts MD, Chairperson of Friends of Medicare and myself. Paul debunked the common health care myths and thanked the people active in Friends of Medicare for their many victories in defending public health care from the Klein government over the years. Diana did a reality check on the recent op ed by Preston Manning touting private health insurance as the key to better health care performance (a la Europe). She submitted an op-ed printed in the Edmonton Journal. Avalon called for an audit of the provincial auditor of regional health authorities as there is currently zero accountability or transparency. (See details below).

A very lively discussion followed with a diverse audience that included health care activists, health care workers, academics, Gillian Steward, a Liberal MLA, seniors, etc. (60+ people). A question was raised about what to do about all the lies and the lying liars who tell them. I responded with an observation from Ursula Franklin about living under corporate occupation and needing to speak the truth and shed light. Questions were asked about what kind of actions should be taken. Paul Moist referred to CUPE's national celebration of Tommy Douglas' birthday with the 'two-tier' cake policy. Other ideas included sending members of the Raging Grannies to meet Tory candidate Jim Dinning

in an upcoming seniors luncheon. The audience was also encouraged to meet with the prominent MPs representing Calgary.

Media: There was no coverage of the Town Hall but Paul had an op-ed in the Calgary Herald the previous day.

Lethbridge, Thursday, Nov 2

By Michael McBane, CHC

Harvey Voogd (Alberta Friends of Medicare) organized an early afternoon press conference in Lethbridge. All the local media came and filed stories (CTV, Global TV, Country 95.5 FM and the Lethbridge Herald.).

The local chapter of Friends of Medicare organized a Town Hall meeting in the Lethbridge Public Library. There were approximately 30 people in attendance including a local MLA, the leader of the Alliance Party, as well as an official from the regional health authority. Harvey and I presented. Very interesting questions from the Alliance MLA. He is new and still learning about health care policy after several questions observed: "I looks to me that they are deliberately trying to break the public health care system."

The Lethbridge Herald story was excellent and included a photo of Harvey and myself with this headline: "Vigilance needed for Medicare to survive". The Herald also ran a story announcing the public meeting the day before: "Friends of Medicare hosting public session Thursday at library". Stories also ran on the local radio and TV news. Other Alberta media includes: Red Deer Advocate - Front page story with photo: "Tory health views sought"; Red Deer Express - "Candidates should be clear on health care: lobbyists"; St. Albert Gazette: "Health care must remain public, says analyst'.

Yellowknife, Saturday, Nov 4

By Michael McBane, CHC

The Town Hall meeting was hosted by Alternatives North, PSAC North, the Northern Territories Federation of Labour and the NWT Area Council of PSAC. The panel was moderated by Jean-Francois Deslauriers, Vice President of PSAC North. The panelists were Shireen Mansouri, MD, a physician at the Stanton hospital but spoke as a board member of the CMA; Barb Round, RN, Registered Nurses Association of the NWT and Nunavut; Suzette Montreuil, an occupational therapist and co-chair of Alternatives North.

It was good the CMA participated in two meetings so far. The 2 board members appear to be strong supporters of public health care - maybe the message will get reported back to CMA HQ in Ottawa.

It was held on Saturday evening at the Baker Community Center. Approximately 25 people in attendance. A good cross section including several nurses, an ADM in the Territorial government, labour activists and leaders, including Mary Lou Cherwaty, President of the Northern Fed.

Media: Arrived in Yellowknife Friday afternoon and did a CBC Radio interview advertising the Saturday Town Hall meeting. The *Yellowknifer* newspaper sent a reporter who stayed for the event and interviewed panelists afterwards.

Thanks to Suzette, Ben, Jacquelin and Jean-Francois for their hospitality. John Nolan's Tommy Douglas play on Friday night was a fitting lead up to the Medicare Works Town Hall. Weather, you ask? Minus 20 with full moon and Northern Lights!

Winnipeg, Monday, Nov 6

By Kathleen Connors, CHC

I provided a half hour presentation in Winnipeg to the Manitoba Federation of Labour Convention on Saturday, November 4, 2006. There were 500 delegates from the MFL affiliates in attendance for the presentation, which was well received. NDP MP Bill Blaikie spoke later in the morning and acknowledged the sustained work of the CHC on health care during his life as a parliamentarian.

The Winnipeg Town Hall was made possible when Jennifer Howard and a number of groups and individuals who were active in the Manitoba Medicare Alert Coalition of some years ago decided to organize a meeting in conjunction with the MFL presentation. Jennifer is the Executive Director of the Women's Health Clinic, a successful community health clinic that is celebrating 25 years of providing primary health care to women in Winnipeg. She and staff at the Clinic played a leadership role in organizing, advertising, and holding the Town Hall.

Jennifer was also successful in organizing a half hour meeting with Manitoba Health Minister Theresa Oswald and her Senior Advisor Jennifer Faulder. We discussed a range of issues, from building an ongoing relationship to sharing strategies on the pharmaceutical issue and federal-provincial wrangling.

The Town Hall was held in a meeting room at the Women's Health Centre and attended by about 40 people from a broad spectrum of the community – including social activists, health care providers, labour activists, seniors and mental health advocates. Minister Oswald's Senior Advisor attended as well. At the end of the session she indicated that the

presentations were “the best possible briefing I could have had on the issues.” She requested a copy of the PowerPoint presentation and some additional information, which has been provided. The University of Winnipeg student radio station recorded the meeting for broadcast use.

Thanks to all that contributed to the Manitoba events. Let’s keep building the momentum.

Halifax, Wednesday, Nov 15

By Kathleen Connors, CHC

The Nova Scotia Citizens Health Care Network sponsored a successful Town Hall on November 15, 2006. The event was attended by approximately 70 members of the public, including students, seniors, labour activists, health care providers and ordinary citizens. Also present were politicians – federal NDP leader Jack Layton, MP Alexa McDonough, provincial Liberal Health Critic David Wilson, and NDP MLA Maureen Macdonald. Both Layton and Wilson brought greetings as the evening began, with Wilson promising that the Liberals will hold the current government to their promise to introduce legislations to govern private clinics during the current fall sitting.

Ian Johnson chaired the evening and provided an excellent overview of health issues facing the Nova Scotia public. Dr. John Gillis, a Board member of Canadian Doctors for Medicare, provided a PowerPoint overview of where the group stands on Medicare and its future. The presentation pointed out that the advocates of market medicine are exploiting the Chaoulli decision. Dr. Gillis did make the point that physicians have always have been private entrepreneurs working in a publicly funded system and questioned what was wrong with procedures being performed in the private physician’s office. Karen Mackenzie, Vice-president of CUPE Nova Scotia and an X-ray technician, spoke as a long time health care worker, addressing the weakening of the public health care system by the drain of scarce health care workers when a private for-profit clinic opens.

I provided the CHC PowerPoint presentation covering the campaign issues and themes.

A lively question and answer period followed. The issue of does it really matter who delivers the care as long as it is publicly funded arose. Pharmaceutical issues – the need for pharmacare, improved prescribing, reliance on drugs versus lifestyle changes, need for comprehensive home care, implementation of true primary health care reform were all raised. The fact sheets and flyers were well received. The importance of political action was addressed and people took the letter to politicians. Names were collected on the sign up sheets for future activities.

On the day of the Town Hall, members of the Halifax Chapter of the Council of Canadians had organized a "Frosting the Privatization Cake" event in downtown Halifax where the public received slices of cake and information about the Town Hall.

Kingston, Wednesday, Nov 15

By Natalie Mehra, Ontario Health Coalition (OHC)

The Kingston meeting was held at Queen's University. Speakers were Tom Kent, senior advisor to Lester B. Pearson and a fellow at Queen's School of Policy Studies, Steven Shrybman, partner at Sack Goldblatt Mitchell and intervenor in the Supreme Court challenge on Medicare, and myself, on behalf of the Ontario Health Coalition.

We were covered well by the CHUM radio station every hour leading in for two days and the TV station (CKWS) stayed to film for the entire event. Queen's radio also recorded the whole event for broadcasting.

There were 60-70 people in attendance. We were a little disappointed with the turnout but the event was two days after the municipal elections in which the community's progressive forces worked intensely. They got all but one of their candidates elected and now form the majority of council. So the timing was not ideal.

Tom Kent talked about how the Pearson government was always told that they were going to ruin the country with Medicare and other social programs and it never happened, in fact, quite the opposite. He called passionately for an expansion of Medicare and made a proposal for a comprehensive health promotion and prevention strategy including pharmacare and denticare to cover all children to start. He called Medicare a case of "arrested development" that should be expanded.

Steven Shrybman spoke gave an eloquent and comprehensive defense of public health care. He talked about the threat that P3s and privatization of delivery - specifically support services - pose to the public system. He reviewed the Chaoulli case and the drug advertising case.

I did a role-play about two tiering and how it increases costs and makes the queue more irrational, unjust and longer. I covered the major threats and our solutions.

The discussion was very interesting. Two radiologists (who likely had been involved in setting up the for-profit clinic which has now been non-profitized) walked out in anger. Several other physicians were present and one gave an impassioned critique of the role of the College of Physicians and Surgeons in cutting the number of doctors. Several nurses and other staff from Kingston General Hospital also attended and participated actively. There were also a number of students in attendance as well as community members.

The discussion centred on how to defend the public system, how to improve access, questions about costs and a vision for the future. The group took 2,000 pamphlets and several hundred of the key fact sheets to distribute around campus and the community at libraries, doctors' offices, social service agencies and other areas. A number of people committed to phone the Liberal MPP and MP to tell them to insist that Liberal leadership candidates support single-tier and enforce the CHA. All were interested in doing more leading into the federal election. We got several bookings for speaking engagements on the issue with the Assoc. of University Women, Queen's International Development speaking, student events and community groups.

Ross Sutherland from the local coalition chaired the evening and did a great job.

Vancouver, Wednesday, Nov 15

By Michael McBane, CHC

The Town Hall meeting took place at the Anza Club. The speakers were Robert Woollard, MD, Canadian Doctors for Medicare and head of UBC Department of Family Practice; Diana Gibson, Parkland Institute; and Will McMartin, Tyee columnist. Alice Edge, co-chair of the BC Health Coalition moderated.

Will McMartin debunked the BC government and BC media claim that health care spending is 'exploding out of control'. The B.C. government budget surplus this year is greater than health care spending increases over the next three years. It's obviously a matter of political choices. BC health care spending (public and private) in '84-85 was 6.1% of GDP. Last year it was just under 7%. Health care spending is stable as a percentage of the economy, but rising as a percentage of the budget because of tax cuts and cuts to other program spending. Will's columns are excellent and available on line at: <http://thetyee.ca>

Dr. Woollard's PowerPoint presentation described the current context for Medicare as well as the goals and objectives of Canadian Doctors for Medicare (CDM). Woollard pointed out the many missed opportunities – especially after the Romanow Report for system change – with primary health care reform and the expansion of insured services.

Diana Gibson gave her presentation on the myths of private health insurance and the so-called European model. She made a strong case that now is the time to go on the offence to expand Medicare (pharmacare, dental, LTC, comprehensive coverage, and social determinants of health) instead of letting the right frame the debate.

A Q&A period followed. The first question was from a young woman – a diabetes activist observing that the issues around drug coverage are so complex, what is an individual to do? Will made a strong plea for lobbying politicians – go visit them and challenge them, since they are preoccupied with what the “public” thinks. Colleen

Fuller observed that we know a lot about problems in the public system (wait times, etc.) but what we don't know about is growing private for-profit system (unregulated, unaccountable and secret).

The BC Health Coalition put Medicare Works ads in the alternative press. No media coverage but a video of the presentations was made by Julius Fisher and will be made available on the coalition web page as an educational resource. It was a very stormy day and turn out – approximately 80 people - was decent in the circumstances (power outages and no drinking water...). A good cross section including members of Seniors on Guard for Medicare, nurses, hospital workers, Vancouver Chapter of the Council of Canadians, academics and other members of the BC Health Coalition.

Courtenay/Comox, Thursday, Nov 16

By Michael McBane, CHC

The meeting was held in a downtown seniors' center and was sponsored by Citizens for Quality Health Care and the local chapter of the Council of Canadians. Approximately 80 people attended, including Catherine Bell, NDP MP for North Vancouver Island and several health care workers, including nurses, hospital employees and social workers.

Richard Hagensen, from the local health coalition Citizens for Quality Health Care, chaired the evening. The coalition is fighting the plan to close two community hospitals and build a new private P-3 hospital in the middle of nowhere as part of a land development and privatization scheme.

I presented next with my standard presentation followed by a PowerPoint presentation from Guy Caron (CoC) which took the form of a reality check on a recent speech of Dr. Brian Day to the Fraser Institute with all the standard lies. (I'm sure Guy would share a copy with anyone interested).

A very lively Q&A followed, and the proceedings were taped for broadcast the next day by Campbell River Television. An independent community paper covered the event and the local paper had a story the previous day.

Saskatoon, Friday, Nov 17

By Kathy Storrie, Saskatchewan Health Coalition

The presentation by Dr Michael Rachlis was co-sponsored by the Health Sciences Association of SK, the SK Union of Nurses and the SK Health Coalition. Dr Rachlis was his usual sparkling and energizing self and his talk was much appreciated by the audience of about 60-70 people among them being union members, health care professionals

including public health, seniors, students (some were health care students) and one Member of the Legislature.

Dr Rachlis gave a masterful overview of the past and present features of Canada's health care system, stressing its design to meet acute care needs, and its resulting inability to meet today's overwhelming challenges posed by chronic illness. He contrasted Tommy Douglas' vision of a seamless, integrated system informed by a public health, preventive perspective (including good housing and adequate income for all) with our present reality of outmoded design, very poor coordination, and mismanagement of diseases like diabetes and lung disease which could be largely avoided in the first place and failure to deal effectively with the social determinants of health.

He presented strong evidence for "Medicare being the right road to take" and outlined a number of practices and policies which would help to fix the system and which have already been shown to do so. He commended the Saskatoon Community Clinic, the Saskatoon Health Region and the SK Quality Council for their leadership in innovation.

Dr Rachlis was interviewed by Shaw Cable TV. His website is: www.michaelrachlis.com Visit there to download his latest book, *Prescription for Excellence! How Innovation is saving Canada's Health Care System*.

Whitehorse, Saturday, Nov 18

By Michael McBane, CHC

The meeting was co-sponsored by PSAC North and the local chapter of the Council of Canadians and was held in the United Church hall. Panel participants were Patricia McGarr, RN, Registered Nurses Association of Yukon (RNAY), Sally McDonald, MD, Michael Doherty, R.C. Diocese of Whitehorse, Guy Caron, CoC, and myself. The panel was moderated by Jean-Francois DesLauriers, PSAC North. There were about 25 people.

The standard CHC PowerPoint was presented. Guy then made his presentation on "Dr. Profit" Day. Sally McDonald, member of the Yukon Medical Association, was speaking personally. She specializes in collaborative health care and has worked throughout the Arctic as well as Africa and Asia with Crossroads. Dr. McDonald commented after Guy's reality check on Dr. Day, "Nobody has the answer, Dr. Day – or Guy". She also referred to Sweden having "some" private health care and Canada should look at it. She also referred to health care as a "privilege".

Patricia from the RNAY declared with pride that she was born in the same town as Tommy Douglas – Falkirk, Scotland. She recalls her father warning citizens that Margaret Thatcher was destroying the National Health System in Britain and said, "Do people not remember what it was like before the NHS?" Patricia quoted Romanow challenging the promoters of two-tier to present the evidence – and he is still waiting.

Michael Doherty, a Catholic social justice activist, spoke about his family experience growing up in the US without universal public health insurance. His father went bankrupt because of medical bills, they lost their family home and his mother was left destitute. Michael asked angrily, "Why are we even talking about this?" The collective approach that is just and obviously superior to market medicine.

In the discussion the issue of threats from international trade agreements was raised, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement. Other countries have learned from Canadian trade mistakes.

Media included two lead-up radio interviews the previous week, a lead up story in the *Whitehorse Daily Star* (November 16, 2006: 'The price of Medicare is eternal vigilance'); a CBC Radio interview Friday afternoon and a reporter attended the entire session from the *Yukon News*.

Ottawa, Monday, Nov 20

By Michael McBane, CHC

The meeting was held in the Ottawa Public Library. Panelists included Allan Maslove, an economist at Carleton University, Steven Shrybman with Sack Goldblatt Mitchell LLP, Natalie Mehra of the OHC and myself. Marlene Rivier and Hugh Armstrong moderated the panel. There were about 55 people, including Paul Dewar, NDP MP for Ottawa Centre Marion Dewar and John Foster of the North South Institute.

I presented the standard PowerPoint which included the stats showing Medicare spending (doctors and hospitals) at 4% of GDP from 1980 to 2005 and projected by Finance Department at the same rate for the next 40 years). Steven spoke about Medicare as socialist program, the Chaoulli case, Quebec's Bill 33 and the Canwest charter challenge of the ban on direct to consumer drug advertising. Allan reinforced the point about the efficiencies in Canada's public health insurance system (versus the U.S.) They spend almost twice as much as Canadians as a % of GDP and this saving represents approximately \$100 billion per year. He also said the best way to defend Medicare is to expand it with Pharmacare, long term care.

Natalie did an effective role play to illustrate that private MRI clinics don't shorten the number of people waiting for an MRI test – they simply take people with money and move them to the front of the line, as the private MRI clinic is run by a doctor that is working less in the public system. Natalie also pointed out the success stories in Ontario as a result of coalition organizing and fight backs. The successes include: a) major reinvestment in hospitals and acute care; b) stopped the private cancer clinic in Sunnybrook hospital; c) stopped the private for-profit MRI clinics; d) reduced the number of services privatized in the P3 deals; e) stopped the Copeman clinics from opening in Ontario.

The Q&A featured a lot of discussion on how bad P3 hospital deals are. Thanks to Marlene and Hugh and all the other members of the Ottawa Health Coalition for organizing the event. Media included a lead in radio story (CKCU) and CTV late night news (CJOH).

Sudbury, Tuesday, Nov 21

By Natalie Mehra, OHC

This was a terrific meeting organized by the Sudbury Health Coalition, with over 70 people in attendance. The meeting was in a local nursing home and some of the residents came along with health care workers and concerned citizens.

Gerry Lougheed Jr., a local business person, kicked off the meeting by speaking about his experience with the Forum on Health. He unequivocally supports a single-tier health system and advocated strongly for the improvement and expansion of the public system to include pharmacare and homecare.

I spoke about the attack on the public system and about provincial matters including the P3s and the LHINs. I advocated for a strong offense as the antidote to the attack. Rick Grylls talked about the economic case for public Medicare and about poverty. He compared our record with northern Europe and advocated for a more robust social system.

There were lots of questions and discussion. The group was very engaged and wanted to do more. There was excellent media coverage including lead in and follow up stories in the Sudbury Star, TV coverage and interviews and radio. A special thanks to Anne Marie McInnes from the local coalition for all her work.

Sault Ste. Marie, Wednesday, Nov 22

By Natalie Mehra, OHC

This was another terrific meeting organized by the Sault Health Coalition, with about 70 people at the meeting held at Algoma University.

Mike McBane kicked things off with his power point presentation that was received very well. A number of people commented about the figures on health spending and the language used by the privateers to promote their business interests. Norman Rivard from the Steelworkers spoke about the economic case for public Medicare. This was very well received and was commented upon by the audience in the Q&A session. My impression was that this is new information that our members like and feel that it helps to bolster the case. Lynn Watson the Reeve of Echo Bay (next door to the Soo) spoke about his

municipal council's decision not to help fund the P3 in the Soo. He said that his community voted overwhelmingly in the plebiscite and continued to support him on this issue in the municipal election. I did my demonstration on two-tier and spoke about the threats of privatization at the national and provincial levels.

There was a long Q & A session with very good input from the group in attendance. Because there is a *C-difficile* outbreak at the local hospital, people were very concerned about privatization of support services and asked many questions about this. Bud Wildman, former MPP for this area was in attendance and gave lots of input.

The Sault Star and *Sault Today* had lead in and post-meeting media coverage. The CMA responded with a letter. There was also radio coverage and interviews. Thank you to David Harasymiw of the Sault Health Coalition for a terrific job chairing.

Thunder Bay, Thursday, Nov 23

By Natalie Mehra, OHC

This was a small meeting with about 20 people at the local library. There was lots of media, including TV, newspaper (lead in and post event) and lead-in radio.

Mike McBane, Norm Rivard and I did our presentations as described above. Norm talked about the Bombardier plant and the connection to public Medicare. The First Nations also sent a speaker who talked about treaty and access issues. There was a very good Q & A with lots of input from the group. Thanks to Evelina Pan from the local coalition and labour council for her organizing effort!

Peterborough, Thursday, Nov 23

By Eduardo Sousa, Council of Canadians (CoC)

About 150 people showed up to the Peterborough Town Hall organized by Roy Brady, the Peterborough CoC Chapter and the local health coalition. It was held in a gym and certainly very much had a community feel to the event. It was a good mix of young and old.

The Raging Grannies opened the evening with their songs, finishing by asking people to stand up to sing our national anthem, "Oh Medicare...!" I followed, by speaking about the provincial situation, mainly the threats to our system through the creation of LHINs and the P3 hospitals.

Cathy Graham, who is a nurse and teaches in the Trent University nursing program spoke next from the perspective of the impacts of privatization and cutbacks on the nursing

profession. It was great having her there because she offered a needed perspective from a sector of professional healthcare workers.

Dr. Michael Rachlis gave a fascinating PowerPoint presentation on why our system is ailing and what we need to do to fix it. He spoke to the economics of our system, and summed up what the 3 basic public views are to healthcare system - there is the "Globe & Mail View", where we need some form of privatization because the system does not work, or the "cruel to be kind" view; there is the "Toronto Star View", where more \$\$ is needed to fix the system and enforcement of the CHA; and the "National Post View", that Medicare was always a bad idea but not too late to do the right thing but privatizing the whole system.

The Q&A included a convoluted question from a former member of 2 hospital boards (Nanaimo and some local hospital) who asked what was wrong with privatization. After some exchanges of views he stormed out. The evening finished up with action proposals to the audience from us, the panelists, members of the local coalition, and from members of the audience.

There was great media coverage leading up to the event – very unusual – and then at the event itself, with local radio station Star 93.3, Cogeco TV Station, and a couple of newspapers.

Kenora, Saturday, Nov 25

By Natalie Mehra, OHC

Again a small meeting of between 20 and 30 people attending this Saturday morning session at the community centre. The two community newspapers, *Enterprise* and *The Kenora Daily Miner*, both did lead-in stories and coverage of the event.

Colin Wasacase, a First Nations city councillor spoke engagingly about the values of public Medicare and what it means to the community. RoryMcMillan, another city councillor gave the economic case for public healthcare. Both these were very well received. Mike & I gave our presentations about the national and provincial threats.

In the Q & A, a nurse from the RNAO spoke passionately about the need for improvements and defense of the public health system. The Ontario Nurses' Association rep for this area was also in attendance and supported the meeting.

People were concerned that the new Kenora hospital might be turned into a P3. One audience member spoke movingly about her sister with osteomyelitis before the Medicare system was introduced.

Portability was a big issue as many travel across the border to Manitoba for treatment and there is a need for Manitoba health professionals to have access to practice here. Huge thanks to Cassie Moeller and the local coalition for their work.

Sioux Lookout, Sunday, Nov 26

By Natalie Mehra, OHC

Over 40 people attended this meeting at the Native Friendship Centre. The panel included Dr. Claudette Chase from Doctors for Medicare who gave a very clear case for public health care. Laura Wynn from the friendship centre talked about their programs and the major needs in the community. Mike & I did our presentations on the national and provincial threats.

People asked lots of questions and told stories of excellent health care access. The overwhelming opinion was that people are thankful for the health system and the care they get. One woman talked about the privatization of hospital food services and how the food has become absolutely atrocious. Many noted that privatization won't work in the north since there is no profit to be made. A first nations elder talked about the need to stop the commodification that has been brought in by white society.

St Catharines, Tuesday, Nov 28

By Eduardo Sousa, CoC

We had about 30 people come out on this very foggy and clammy night at the Russell Hill Community Centre. Sue Hotte of the Niagara Region Coalition moderated the evening, which consisted of the panel followed by Q&A and Discussion.

Mike McBane went first, delivering his PowerPoint presentation. Terry Wade, a professor at Brock University spoke next. He talked about the importance of looking at the social determinants of health and of values - Medicare - a commodity or a right?

I spoke next on behalf of the OHC and CoC, and like last week, I spoke to the threats facing Ontarians of our system here - the LHINs and P3 hospitals. I also talked about the almost-invisible principles of the CHA. I also added in Tommy Douglas' missed Stage 2 of his vision of Medicare that called for prevention and promotion - I was very much influenced by M. Rachlis' presentation last week!

George Addison then spoke very passionately about values, public healthcare and social justice. He is a chaplain at Brock University. He talked about life before Medicare and how indeed the vision that came from Tommy Douglas arose out of decades of struggle for a public system rooted in the great social movements of the early 20th century. Many

of these were based on Christian progressive principals of social-justice, and indeed, George, identifies himself as "proud member of the Christian Left". He also noted how social justice is at the heart of all religions. His passion was clearly there as ended his presentation in a call to extend public Medicare more deeply into the life of Canadians.

Parry Sound, Tuesday, Nov 28

By Natalie Mehra, OHC

This was a tiny meeting of 15 people in the Parry Sound Museum. There is no local health coalition in Parry Sound so women from the NDP riding association and the Liberal riding association pulled the meeting together. The group consisted of administrators from local non-profits, careworkers and nurses, and concerned citizens.

Hilda Swirsky of the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario gave a presentation about why privatization is bad for care and the health system. I talked about the emboldened attacks and gave the case for public non-profit care. The group agreed to set up a local health coalition and hold spin-off meetings in the region leading into the election.

The discussion was extremely good. People expressed deep concern about Tony Clement and the Conservatives and wanted to hold some bigger meetings to get the word out and begin the process of organizing in this region. Since the meeting, we have received memberships and lots of correspondence from people interested in the new health coalition. 1,000 leaflets were taken to distribute around the community. Media coverage was excellent on 2 local radio stations and the local newspaper.

London, Wednesday, Nov 29

By Eduardo Sousa, CoC

The London Town Hall was great if the diversity of the panel and the attendance was anything to judge by. We had 75 people show up at the Legion Hall last night. The head of the local London Health Coalition, Jim Kennedy, introduced the evening and panel.

First up was Terry Moore. Terry is a local businessman and offered a unique and rare (business) perspective on single-tier public Medicare (he owns a US-based business; memorable quote, "we sell vinyl-siding - install it safely or you will end up in the health care system"). He was very much in favor of a single-tier publicly run healthcare system.

Natalie Mehra of the OHC went next. She noted that the Sarnia Health Coalition was also in attendance including a key member who has just been elected to local council. Natalie sketched out the national pressures to the system at work – including Bill 33 in Quebec, the situation in Alberta, BC, and more recently Nova Scotia with their planned private

clinics. She also debunked some of the arguments the other side makes around looking to Europe, use of language, the wait times argument.

Diane Stonefish, Grand Chief of the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians, spoke next. The perspectives of First Nations on health care and privatization have been sorely needed. Grand Chief Stonefish talked about the serious social and economic issues in First Nations communities and linked them to the threat of privatization of our health care system. She also talked about how planning for public Medicare must be done for the 7th Generation and how we all indeed must fight for Medicare with the 7th generation in mind. Overall Grand Chief Stonefish was there to bring a message of solidarity, saying 'we are here to stay...we stand tall with you to protect public healthcare and to fight privatization'.

Tim Carey of the CAW local spoke next. He noted that in the recent by-election in London nothing much was said about Medicare. Tim also told us a few stories including how before Medicare when he was young his baby brother almost died of a blood disorder because inexpensive treatment of the disorder was very hard to find. He also drove home the point that with private Medicare that more and more unions will be seeking coverage through collective bargaining so it is in the interests of both business and citizens to fight to keep Medicare public.

Lastly, we had Maude speak to the bigger picture, that what we are facing is part of a global struggle - the privatization of everything. She noted that our public Medicare is the 'bug in the {corporate global} system', that we are in the way of what they want to do. Maude also noted that our work must be understood in the context of Deep Integration and notably the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America. Maude also told some stories of how privatized healthcare has affected people elsewhere, so 'let's roll up our sleeves'.

Before we launched the Q&A, Natalie gave a call to action – asking if people were interested in spin-off Town Hall meetings in the months to come; asked people to take lots of brochures; asked people to call their MPs and MPPs; and flagged that early in the new year we will be gearing up for federal spring election and later provincial election.

People were very attentive and appreciative of the event. CBC Radio taped the whole evening and interviewed a few panelists and spent considerable time with Maude.

Many thanks to the London Health Coalition, the London Chapter for putting on a very good public event.

Kitchener, Thursday, Nov 30

By Eduardo Sousa, CoC

The event itself took place at the Kitchener Public Library in a very cosy auditorium. The Waterloo Region Health Coalition (WRHC) organized the evening where over 40 people showed up.

Orville Thancker of the WRHC introduced the evening and talked about the local health delivery situation - how the emergency room at one of the 2 major hospitals in the area almost closed (and almost was given over on a temporary basis to a private firm), the recent resignation of the one the hospitals' CEO's. He noted that Howard Dean gave a keynote speech at the Liberal Leadership Convention talked about how the Democratic Party plans to make public Medicare a major plank of the Party.

Natalie spoke first and gave a great talk on the coming “perfect storm” hitting public Medicare, with the convergence of forces – the Feds not enforcing CHA, Quebec’s Bill 33, Dr. Profit (Dr. Day of the CMA) and strident communications campaign by privateers. She also put on a skit debunking how 2-tier will ease pressure on the public system. She outlined many ways to make things better and spoke of the victories we all who are fighting privatization in the province have had.

Paul Moist, head of CUPE National went next. Paul gave a very poignant and focused talk on the dangers of privatization of Medicare at all levels, from the local to the international. Another interesting point he made was linking the outbreak of *C difficile* with privatized cleaning services in some hospitals. Paul also quoted a story from Life Before Medicare - which comes as recommended reading for those of us campaigning on this issue.

Maude wrapped up the evening and rather than give the talk she did the night before instead incorporated and responded to what she heard from Natalie and Paul. She did talk to NAFTA and the threats trade deals pose to our system. Maude also noted that we are allowing the death of public Medicare through 1000 cuts.

Media - Maude did an earlier interview with a Kitchener radio station. That evening on CTV news both Natalie and Maude each were shown in separate reports - one dealing with the local issues and one on the broader issues and the event itself.

Toronto, Friday, Dec 1

By Eduardo Sousa, CoC

Although the Dec. 1st event was planned in advance of the National Town Hall Tour for Public Medicare as a fundraiser for the OHC, the event in fact was rolled into the overall national initiative.

Called "Rising Up! Reports on Social Movements & Defending Medicare" the event featured Maude Barlow, Naomi Klein, Ana Gladys and Natalie Mehra and was moderated by th co-chair of the OHC, Dora Jeffries.

The event took place on cold, wet Friday night in a huge old church in downtown Toronto. About 350 people came out to hear the panel speak which was impressive given the fact that many were staying home to watch the Federal Liberal Leadership Convention, the miserable weather and many competing events that night.

Dora Jeffries of the OHC opened the evening by talking about the threats public Medicare is facing in Ontario.

Maude spoke first by providing the big picture, by tying in the power of social movements around the world in stemming the neo-liberal forces seeking to privatize everything. Maude also tied in her experiences of being at the previous Town Hall meetings - the stories, the questions and concerns from those in attendance - to the threats facing our public Medicare system.

Ana Gladys of the El Salvadoran Citizen's Network of Ontario went next. Ana spoke on behalf of those in El Salvador who have been facing the continued privatization of their once public healthcare system. Ana also noted how the activity of Canadian mining companies is having a heavy negative impact on the environment and thus human health in a country facing severe limited resourcing of the public healthcare system. Already closed have been public facilities that provided dialysis, kidney, and cancer treatments, forcing people to go to the private sector - while indeed many have been unable to and thus are falling through the cracks.

Author and Journalist Naomi Klein spoke next. She noted how our country is going in the opposite direction of those of the southern countries in the Americas by continuing to prop up a discredited system of neo-liberatization especially in regards to public Medicare. She described how Latin Americans have been sloughing off the neo-liberal agenda and said that a 'counter-counter' revolution has been underway, albeit with limitations and variations. She noted that almost all the leaders of those countries who were in Quebec City for the Summit of the Americas have been chased out and along with them the agenda the FTAA sought to impose. She exhorted us to get our courage back. Much good is taking place, that we have positive role models and need to re-join the Americas in this regard.

Natalie Mehra of the OHC then closed out the panel by talking to the national public Medicare situation - the wedge issues in Quebec, BC, Alberta that overall seek to leverage individual rights over those of collective rights. Given this was the night that the Liberals were hearing speeches from the Leadership contenders, Natalie talked about the various positions each of the main contenders had previously articulated, with the opinion that overall they are not fully supportive of a fully funded/operated public

system. Noting that Jack Layton was in the audience, Natalie said that we must all push the NDP to fight on this issue because the other parties are not.

Hamilton, Monday, Dec 4

By Natalie Mehra, OHC

Over 60 folks came out to a very interesting meeting in Hamilton despite a snow and ice storm.

Dr. P.J. Devereaux presented information from his group's meta-analysis of death rates in for-profit versus not-for-profit hospitals in the U.S. He gave the long version of his talk and the audience was rapt throughout. The main points are well known, so I won't go into them in detail here. The conclusion was that for-profit hospitals cut corners in staffing leading to higher death rates that are statistically significant.

Linda Haslam Stroud, President of the Ontario Nurses' Association presented the case against privatization, the need for health human resources planning and stopping P3s. She gave a lively and interesting talk, well received and supported especially by a number of Hamilton nurses who were in attendance.

Rolf Gerstenberger, President of the local Steelworkers, spoke about his support for the public health system. He called for the recognition of health care as a human right, and drew a parallel to the fight the local steelworkers have waged in Hamilton to protect themselves from attempts to open and take concessions from their collective agreement. He talked about how workers understood when their rights were violated and that we need to explain the fight to protect the health system in these terms.

I did a role play on the consequences of two-tiering, talked about the gathering storm, and how fighting back works, with a list of success stories from Ontario.

There were lots of questions from the crowd of seniors, nurses, hospital workers, steelworkers, Council of Canadians, the Burlington Liberal Riding Association, local NDP, and others. Over 2,000 leaflets were taken to distribute around the community and members agreed to meet in January to forge the action plan leading into the federal election. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Ted Haines and Lois Boggs, the local coalition co chairs. Thanks to Lois Boggs and Amy Maas of the Hamilton Health Coalition for coordinating the work to get the meeting together.

Scarborough, Tuesday, Dec 5

By Natalie Mehra, OHC

Another small meeting of just over 20 people in a Scarborough Public Library in the

middle of rush hour.

Hilda Swirsky from the RNAO presented again (see Parry Sound), as did Paul Moist, President of CUPE. Paul spoke about the threat of P3s, the mounting attacks nationally and ways in which wait times can be addressed in the public system. I did my usual presentation. There was a very good and long discussion about local health issues – the consolidation of local hospital services, the local P3 threat, and long waits in the emergency room in Scarborough.

The group agreed to meet in January to plan a lead in to the federal election. Over 1,000 leaflets were taken for distribution. A warm thanks to Effie Vlachoyannacos from the Scarborough Health Coalition for organizing the meeting. There was excellent lead in and follow up coverage in the Chinese language newspaper and the Scarborough Mirror.