

More than Ten Thousand People at Public Meetings, Protests Across Ontario in Fight-Back to Save Hospital Services

The decision by the McGuinty government to fund global hospital budgets at a rate less than inflation has spawned a major round of hospital cuts and restructuring affecting hospitals of every size (small, medium and large) in every geographic region of the province. For the first time since the unprecedented Harris government cuts of the mid-1990s, small and rural hospitals are under threat of closure, emergency rooms are being closed, services are being privatized and more than 1,000 layoffs have been announced (details on pp. 2). The situation is slated to get worse in the fiscal year from April 1, 2009 - March 31, 2010 as more than 70% of Ontario's hospitals will be thrown into deficit unless the provincial government improves funding.

Local coalitions and community groups affiliated with the Ontario Health Coalition are fighting back everywhere.

Ombudsman announces investigation of LHIN over complaints about hospital cuts in Niagara & Hamilton

Two deeply unpopular - and unfeasible - plans to cut needed emergency and hospital services have elicited a number of complaints to the Ontario Ombudsman, including a high-profile complaint by MPP Andrea Horwath. In response, the Ombudsman's office has just announced an investigation into the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant LHIN.

The LHIN approved a plan to close down the Emergency Department to adults at McMaster University Medical Centre in Hamilton, despite major outcry from the community and physicians. The plan is for McMaster to cut adult services and specialize only in children's care, leaving residents on the mountain and across a large section of Hamilton with severely reduced access. It is not clear what the additional restructuring plans for Hamilton Health Sciences and St. Joseph's will be, though both hospitals face significant deficits and have reported lay offs in the hundreds to local media. Residents are concerned the remaining ERs will not

be able to handle the influx of thousands of new patients and that cuts will lead to further overcrowding and longer wait times for care.

The Niagara Health System's (NHS) plan to close down virtually all the hospital beds and the Emergency Departments in Port Colborne and Fort Erie has been approved by McGuinty government appointees in the Local Health Integration Network. Port Colborne's ER is slated to close as early as July. By 2013 these two hospitals are to be closed altogether. The plan also includes closures of birthing and mental health beds in Niagara Falls and Welland. The plan has been roundly criticized for inaccurate and implausible pricing, loss of services in local communities, lack of any regional transport, absence of democratic process, and the inability for the remaining hospitals to take the influx of thousands of patients. The NHS is deeply unpopular for a perceived bias against towns outside St. Catharines, allegations of mismanagement and the highest patient mortality rate in Ontario.

Doctors revolt, one LHIN board member resigns in protest

Doctors representing the Kincardine Physicians' Group asked for the resignation of South Bruce-Grey Health Centre CEO Paul Davies stating, "the Medical Staff of the South Bruce-Grey Hospital (Kincardine Site) strongly recommends that the Hospital Board dismiss Mr. Paul Davies". This extraordinary step was taken after the hospital cut and privatized physiotherapy services. Doctors stated that recommended cuts, "threatened or affected physiotherapy, laboratory, mammography and emergency services..." and criticized the CEO's management style. After the doctors' action, the privatization of inpatient physiotherapy was stopped, but outpatient physiotherapy cuts persist.

Revolt & resignation cont'd>

Upcoming Events

Friday, March 27, 2009 - Public Meeting on Hospital Cuts in Wallaceburg
at Wallaceburg District Secondary School, 920 Elgin St. at 6 pm.

Saturday, March 28, 2009 - Students for Medicare present: It's Time to Act Medicare Conference
Innis College, 2 Sussex Ave, University of Toronto
9 am - 5 pm
(see details on page 2)

Tuesday, March 31, 2009 - High-level Briefing & Conference on Long Term Care Regulation and Reform
Intercontinental Centre Hotel, 221 Front St.W. (by Metro Convention Centre) Toronto
10:15 am - 4:30 pm
What works ~ What doesn't ~ What is the government doing ? ~ What has happened in other jurisdictions ~ Best and worst practices~ What should public interest advocates be focusing on ?
See page 3 for details

Saturday, April 4 - Niagara Mass Leafletting Day - meet at noon in St. Catharines at the CAW Hall, 124 Bunting Rd. or at noon at the front doors of the market on King St.

Hamilton - rally on hospital cuts with "Fix Our World" at 2 pm on April 4 at Main St. W. & Summer's Lane

Monday, April 6 - Guelph-Wellington Public Strategy Meeting on Hospital Cuts
7 - 9 pm Mitchell Hall, St. George's Church, 99 Woolwich St.

Saturday, April 18 - Cross Ontario Protests to Stop Hospital Cuts
Local coalitions and fight-back committees will be holding protests at their nearest Liberal MPP office.
To find out about the protest nearest you, please call or email us at 416-441-2502 or ohc@sympatico.ca

Monday, April 13 - Public Meeting on Hospital Cuts in Kingston
Location TBA, call 613-374-5211

Wednesday, April 22 - Public Meeting on Hospital Cuts in Leamington
7 pm, Roma Club, 19 Seaclyffe Dr. E.

Wednesday, April 22 - Public Meeting on Hospital Cuts in Sault Ste. Marie
7 pm, St. Andrew's United Church, 712 Wellington St. E.

Monday, May 4 - Town Hall Meeting on Hospital Cuts in Guelph
6:30 -8:30 pm, Mitchell Hall, St. George's Church, 99 Woolwich St.

