

# Low funding for long-term care is neglect say PSWs, RPNs

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Indifference by the Ontario government, low staffing levels and not enough funding for long-term care (LTC) is resulting in the neglect of residents say personal support workers and nurses who took part in focus groups in five Ontario communities.

The PSWs' and RPNs' responses are in a report released by the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions (OCHU) called *'Long-Term Care in Ontario: Fostering Systemic Neglect.'*

"What PSWs and RPNs told us are frank, powerful and often heart-breaking accounts of how, despite their outmost efforts and dedication they are forced to provide what amounts to substandard care to residents," said Kevin Tyrell, a regional vice-president with OCHU in releasing the report at a media conference at Hillview Active Living Centre in Georgetown earlier this month. Georgetown is just one of 50 Ontario communities where the OCHU is releasing the report.

Focus group participants worked at facilities in Guelph, Blind River, Ottawa, Minden and Toronto.

Tyrell said PSWs and RPNs are "demoralized and defeated by routine understaffing and chronically low staffing levels, which are resulting in lonely, isolated and often depressed residents. PSWs and RPNs simply don't have adequate time to provide residents with the social and emotional care they desperately need."

"It's the provision of emotional care that is key to providing LTC residents with a home to live in, rather than a facility where they are simply warehoused," said Dorothy Winterburn, a PSW in Minden, who told of her own challenges in providing quality care she can be proud of.

"They (residents) all deserve more than seven minutes to get ready in the morning or more than 15 minutes for a bath, or as long as they need to eat a meal," said Winterburn. "There is no dignity in assembly line care."

Winterburn said short staffing is



**Kevin Tyrell, OCHU regional vice-president and Dorothy Winterburn, PSW.**

*Photo by Lisa Tallyn*

causing residents to become incontinent and lose their mobility because there are not enough PSWs to take them to the bathroom.

"This is the ultimate indignity for residents. They deserve much better. These residents fought for and helped build our country, now we must fight for them," said Winterburn.

Tyrell reported 91 per cent of study participants said they're not able to provide good quality care, while 97 per cent identified not enough staff and heavy workloads

as the key reasons they can't provide quality care.

"They identified dangerously high resident to staff ratios—up to 15 residents per PSW on dayshifts and up to 42 residents per PSW on nightshifts. RPN staffing ranged from 30 to 42 per resident on both the day and nightshift.

The report is calling for a legislated four-hour daily care standard and higher ratio of direct care staff.

Chronic understaffing is resulting in injuries in both residents and staffs, infection, bed sores, abuse and unsafe work practices, said Tyrell.

Along with the four-hour minimum standard of care and mandatory staffing ratios of one PSW per eight residents, the report also recommends creating segregated units for violent residents, implementing pre-placement infectious disease testing and providing staff time to take best practice precautions like gowns, masks and gloves to minimize outbreaks, establish acuity levels for current and incoming residents and implement care-appropriate units.

Wellington-Halton Hills MPP Ted Arnott said seniors in Ontario deserve the best long-term care possible.

"We owe them that much and more," said Arnott.

"The compassion and hard work of Ontario's personal support workers and registered practical nurses are indispensable towards achieving the standards of long term care that we insist upon for our seniors," said Arnott. "PSWs and RPNs are valued and appreciated by residents and families. Their concerns about understaffing should not be dismissed by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.

Arnott said in the upcoming provincial budget, "the Government needs to respond to these concerns."

Tyrell said the OCHU is considering presenting draft legislation to the Ontario Health Minister to change the standard of care and filing an age discrimination complaint with the Ontario Human Rights Commission on behalf of long-term care residents.

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*Paul*

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