

COMMENT

Concerned Ontario Doctors ask for public's support at April 23 rally

By Dr. Nadia Alam, MD CCFP-A
Concerned Ontario Doctors

In the last six months I, along with 11,000 other Concerned Ontario Doctors, have watched with mounting frustration as provincial politicians have single-handedly crippled our healthcare system.

The Ontario Liberals have set in motion a record number of short-sighted policies and funding cuts that are undermining the ability of front-line doctors to care for patients.

Many family doctors and specialists are now struggling to keep their practices afloat. Even though physicians run their offices like small businesses, they prioritize patient care and well-being over profit. Since the cuts escalated in 2015, many doctors have had to reduce staff, reduce services or in worst-case scenarios, close their community clinics altogether.

Each week, we hear of older doctors retiring earlier than planned or younger doctors simply leaving the province— and no one is replacing them. The Liberals set up ridiculous bureaucratic roadblocks barring family doctors from even starting a team-based practice, let alone providing comprehensive care that includes house calls, obstetrics, inpatient care and palliative care. For the specialists, funding has been cut for chronic disease management for common illnesses like diabetes, heart failure, colitis, addiction, cirrhosis and kidney disease.

Our taxes fund OHIP. OHIP pays for doctors, nurses, hospitals and community organizations to help us when we are ill or injured. But the Liberals have underfunded OHIP. And as a result, doctors cannot pay for their community clinics, hospitals cannot hire nurses to staff hospital beds, and operating rooms sit empty, gathering dust.

Hundreds of thousands of patients are without access to care and that number is growing daily. Wait lists for specialist appointments and surgeries is growing daily. There have certainly not been any noticeable improvements in home care services, which was the rationale for the cuts as promised by Minister of Health and Long-Term Care Eric Hoskins.

In Halton Hills, we can see clearly the impact of these actions in community-based care and services. Our emergency department, inpatient wards and operating rooms are all bursting at the seams and struggling to keep pace with growing need and shrinking resources.

The last time a government acted unilaterally against physicians, they drove hundreds of physicians out of practice and out of Ontario. One in four patients had no access to care. It took the government nearly 20 years to fix that arrogant mistake.

What will fix this? Binding arbitration. A fair, impartial mechanism to end this stand-off between doctors and the government. It's so simple that other essential services in Ontario already have it in their contracts. And it makes no sense that the provincial Liberals won't grant it to Ontario's physicians.

All of us— as past, present and future patients— should be incensed that the provincial Liberals have deliberately underfunded the healthcare system. The population is growing and aging every day, and as a result, healthcare needs are also growing. However, healthcare spending has been capped well below the rate of inflation, and clearly below the rate of actual patient need.

This while diverting millions of dollars to ever more layers of bureaucracy. Enough is enough.

Concerned Ontario Doctors are asking for your help. We invite you to join us for a public rally on the south lawn of Queen's Park on Saturday, April 23 from 12-3 p.m. to demand that the provincial Liberals stop forcing us all to do more with less. Visit www.carenotcuts.ca for more details, including the free chartered bus services that will be available.

Please stand with us as we demand that the Liberals commit to a long-term plan to properly manage healthcare so that patients no longer suffer and front-line staff no longer burn-out from working in an impossible and unsustainable environment.

Nadia Alam is a Georgetown-based doctor. Her blog is www.huffingtonpost.ca/nadia-alam/ and Twitter: @DocSchmadia



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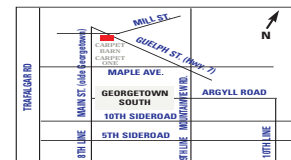
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