

Concerned Ontario Doctors to protest budget cuts at Queen's Park rally

By Kathryn Boyle
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It has taken away medical equipment. It has taken away health staff. It has made it extremely difficult for new doctors to come to town. What is it?

Budget cuts.

For four years, physicians in hospitals and at private offices have seen less and less money at their disposal. Through staff cuts and budgeting, some doctors have been able to manage the decline in funds, but now, doctors are claiming it's starting to affect patient care.

In Ontario, it is illegal for physicians to protest in the form of a strike. So doctors are going for the next best thing: rallying at Queen's Park.

For two years, doctors all over the province have been without a negotiated contract between the government and the Ontario Medical Association. With no contract and declining funds, a conversation started through a Facebook group called Concerned

Ontario Doctors, We Are Your Ontario Doctors, where over 11,000 physicians in the province connect.

One of those members is a local physician of Halton Hills Family Health Team, Dr. Nadia Alam, who is a general practitioner of anaesthesia, and she will be attending the rally this Saturday, April 23.

"When you go to your doctor's office and you walk in through the door, the building, the office itself, the chairs, the staff that are there, the medical equipment, all of that is paid for by the doctor," she explained. "A lot of people don't realize that. They think all of that stuff is funded by the government. It isn't."

In 2015, negotiations for a new contract were officially abandoned, leaving a void in how physicians should be paid in the province. According to Alam, the government hasn't attempted at working out an agreement and has only cut their funding.

"They've been cutting and cutting every couple of months," she said. "And it's gotten so bad a lot of clinics are actually closing because they can't pay the overhead anymore."

"That's why we're rallying at Queen's Park," she said. "We literally can't take it anymore."

According to Alam, the provincial government has claimed there is an abundance of practitioners and are "too expensive," which Alam said is untrue. Another issue is the set of hoops the government has put up for new practitioners, making it very difficult for a new physician to come to town.

"A lot of people in town can't find a family doctor because the new graduates are not allowed to set up here," Alam said. "(The government) set up such significant, democratic and financial roadblocks that you cannot actually open up a practice in town."

Alam said there are solutions out there

for doctors to receive the funding they need, and that's one of the worst things about the issue.

"There is a way of fixing this and starting to fix it and finding the steps in the right direction, but the government's not willing to take it," she said. "I don't understand why."

Alam and the other doctors invite everyone to write a letter to your local Member of Provincial Parliament and to join the rally taking place this weekend.

For more information on the event, their stance on the budget cuts or to connect with those involved in the issue, you can visit www.carenocuts.ca or their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/concernedontariodoctors/.

e-Recycling and Clothing Drive on Saturday, April 23

On Saturday, April 23, an e-Recycling and Clothing Drive is being held, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at the Georgetown Masonic Centre, 12 Lindsay Ct., just off of Trafalgar Rd., south of Hwy 7.

All clothes donated to the Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy (OFCP).

Computers, telephones, stereo equipment,

audio visual equipment and more are welcome. Also don't forget your bag of clothes.

Have a question? Call Tracey, 416-895-9949. This fundraiser by the 2016 Hostess Committee for the International Rainbow for Girls, a Masonic youth group "Helping Girls Get Ready For Life."

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