

FRANKLY SPEAKING: Ministry of Health

MD: Ministry of Health and Long Term Care has deceived us

By Frank Klees, MPP

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May 24, 2013. :

My Friday schedule looked familiar. Names slotted in at half hour intervals. The issues to be discussed were as random, as always, but one meeting today would be particularly disturbing. The schedule:

8.30 a.m.:

An adult man, adopted as a child can't get access to his birth-father's medical history because the birth-mother has vetoed access to the information.

9.00 a.m.:

A young couple want to open a private day-program facility in York Region for people with Alzheimer's.

9.30 a.m.:

A naturopathic practitioner is concerned about proposed regulations that could limit the scope of practice and negatively affect patients.

10.00 a.m.:

A resident of a local Long Term Care home feels she is being abused by staff.

11.00 a.m.:

Conference call with Legislative Research to finalize the Interim Report of the Public Accounts Committee's Investigation in the Ornge Air Ambulance Scandal.

11.30 a.m.:

A visit to a new Diagnostic & Eye Clinic in Newmarket that will mean patients won't have to travel to Toronto for complex eye surgeries.

12.30 p.m.:

Telephone calls and lunch if possible.

2.00 p.m.:

Two Physiotherapists want to discuss cutbacks to physiotherapist services for residents in Long Term Care homes. Serious health consequences for seniors and disabled residents.

2.30 p.m.:

A local pharmacist has information about the mismanagement of the Ontario Drug Benefit Plan and the implications to pharmacists and patients.

3.00 p.m.:

A father whose two children have been abducted to another country wants to discuss the lack of support for his case by the Canadian and Provincial governments.

3.30 p.m.:

The Sadono family want to express their support for the Preserving Existing Communities Act and appreciation for the supply of Ontario pins for a recent trip abroad.

4.00 p.m.:

Appointment Cancelled

5.00 p.m.:

A Government Relations rep wants to discuss the possibility of a casino locating in Vaughan or Markham.

As I read over the schedule, I was puzzled by that two o'clock appointment.

I was certain that the Minister of Health had made a high profile announcement just recently claiming that physiotherapy for seniors was being increased significantly. Something didn't add up.

The first meeting started what would be another typical Friday. These are the days that remind me why after 18 years I still enjoy public service. I don't always have the answers and my staff can't fix every problem, but in most cases we can make a difference in the lives of the people who come through our doors looking for help. This was another one of those good days. But that two o'clock meeting stood out.

The Promise: ?More Physiotherapy, Exercise and Falls Prevention for Seniors?

Maya Stojanovic and Michael Liougas, both experienced physiotherapists, announced they were there to tell me that the government is hiding drastic cuts to physiotherapy. They were concerned for their patients who would suffer the consequences of being denied essential physiotherapy treatments. ?Unconscionable? is how they described the government's decision to cut back on this critical service for our seniors.

Even more disturbing they said, is the deliberate misrepresentation of this issue by the Premier and the Minister of Health. They explained:

On April 18, 2013 The Ministry of Health and Long Term Care announced the ?More Physiotherapy, Exercise and Falls Prevention for Seniors Program?. We were told that the annual budget for this would be \$156 million, including \$20 million in new monies for the ?exercise and falls prevention' portion of the announcement. But here is the catch:

For the fiscal year April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013, government spending on physiotherapy for seniors was actually over \$200 million. If the total budget for physiotherapy for the coming year will be \$156 million and of that, \$20 million will be allocated to a new Exercise and Falls Prevention Program, then that leaves only \$136 million for physiotherapy. That's \$64 million less, not more

physiotherapy!

Following my meeting with Maya and Michael, I received a letter from Dr. Janice Lessard, a respected Internal Medicine and Geriatric Medicine Specialist, in which outlined the serious implications of these physiotherapy cuts to our seniors and people with disabilities. The full letter is posted on my website. She concluded with these words:

?...the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care has deceived us that more physiotherapy will be available for seniors as of August 1, 2013 when, in fact, the amount of money available for physiotherapy will be much less after August 1st than was spent in the 2012-2013 fiscal year, specifically for Long Term Care Homes and Retirement Homes.?

I want to thank Dr. Lessard, and Physiotherapists Maya Stojanovic and Michael Liougas for making their voices heard on this important issue and for standing up for those under their care. I gave them my word that I would too.

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