

FRANKLY SPEAKING: A Personal Appeal

A Personal Support Worker's Appeal for Seniors

By Frank Klees, MPP

Newmarket-Aurora

On Monday, March 3, I took the issue of cuts to personal support services for seniors and people with disabilities to the floor of the Legislature.

That exchange between me and the Minister of Health can be viewed on my website. Two days later, I received the following email from a constituent who has given her permission to share it with you through this column:

?Mr. Klees, I would like to personally thank you for keeping the issue of our seniors losing their on-site care at the forefront. I was in the public gallery on Monday when you brought this issue up again. I could hardly contain myself from jumping up and applauding you. I just happen to be one of the PSWs (Personal Support Workers) providing care for the group of seniors you are advocating for.

?I am sickened by what our government is doing to our most vulnerable, at risk citizens. Over the years we have had many WWII veterans as clients. These men and women fought so that we could have the freedoms we enjoy in this country today. Now it is our turn to fight for them. We don't only provide service to seniors. We are caring for disabled persons and for people with mental challenges as well.

?I don't believe Ms. Matthews understands the difference between on-site care as opposed to off-site care.

?Our on-site care can provide immediate response to our clients in an emergency situation. The CHATS off-site care claims to be able to respond to an emergency within fifteen minutes. Try doing that during a winter like we have had this year! What about during the night when only two staff are on duty and they will be travelling together? Only one call will be responded to at a time. ?If they happen to be responding to a call at the edge of the 3km radius and a call comes in from the opposite edge of the 3 km radius it will be physically impossible for them to respond to that second call within fifteen minutes. In fact, I'm not even sure they could respond to any calls within 15 minutes. Now, what if a third call comes in at the same time?

?I am also being told that the CHATS staff will not have keys to get into the buildings. They expect the person with an emergency to buzz them in. Might be hard to do that from the floor! Or what if they have lost consciousness while waiting? We don't even know if they will have keys to get into the apartments if they do get into the building. A lot of precious time, which could mean the difference between life and death, will be wasted.

?The current on-site ACL staff who can respond in a moment, do have keys to get into clients' apartments. We also have clients who don't understand how to use a paging system properly, so we have taught them to just press their life-line button. The current ACL staff are listed as the first contact for life-lines. The CHATS staff will not be listed as the first contact for a life-line call. We also have medical info on the clients if EMS does have to be called. And if nothing else, we are there to comfort them while waiting for EMS to arrive.

?And what about the clients who cannot get into their bathtubs? We have walk-in showers in the Client Centres where we bring these clients for their showers. Do they never get a proper shower again?

?What about clients on oxygen? In the event of a power outage we know every client who is on a continuous oxygen supply machine which is run by electricity. We head directly to these clients and get them set up on their portable tanks of oxygen immediately.

?Please, let Ms. Matthews know that those people that she so proudly claims returned to their homes to make that all important decision about long term care, probably ended up returning, two or three days later, by ambulance, to the emergency room because they shouldn't have been discharged from the hospital in the first place!

?There has been a petition started to try to fight this. This change in service is supposed to happen March 31, 2014. We need ALL of the opposition to join in to fight for our seniors! At this point even getting this date delayed until further investigation can take place would feel like a win. Yours sincerely, Donna Bellinger.?

Donna has said it well. Join the fight for our seniors and people with disabilities. A copy of the petition is available from my office or on my website at www.frankklees.com.