

# Behind the Front Lines

A recap/critical look at health care news and the reality behind the reporting from the viewpoint of front-line Ontario registered nurses

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## Three Things You'll Learn in This Issue:

1. **New study finds evidence of private/public care quality disparity** – [go](#)
2. **Canadians love their nurses** – [go](#)
3. **Flu vaccine debate continues** – [go](#)

## A Big Winner:



**ONA's 'Value the Invaluable' Campaign has won the prestigious Dennis McGann Stroke-of-Genius Award** – [go](#)

## — Provincial Election —

### PC Platform: Where's the Meat?

The release of the Tim Hudak-led Progressive Conservative party election platform received widespread coverage recently.

Also widespread was criticism from some readers about its lack of detail and questionable math. A letter to the editor ([source](#)) referred to the party's promises to not cut funding to health care or education while simultaneously cutting taxes as reminiscent of the Mike Harris days.

Maxine Josling wrote that the Harris government slashed and burned public services to deliver tax cuts that led to Walkerton and hungry social assistance recipients. [continued on page 2](#)

### Health Care Provider's Lawsuit Asserts Right to Express an Opinion

A lawsuit launched by a Guelph-based occupational therapist raises questions about whether front-line health care workers have the right to express their opinion of how taxpayer-funded health care dollars are spent ([source](#)).

Sue Williams is suing the Waterloo Wellington Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) for constructive dismissal. She alleges she felt pressured to leave her job following the publication of a letter to the editor she wrote to the *Guelph Mercury* ([source](#)). In the letter, she alleges that CCAC officials are not being completely "open and honest" with the public about cuts to services.

Her letter notes the disparities in explanations for service cutbacks made by a variety of officials with the Local Health Integration Network and the CCAC.

Williams says that she's been unable to find a job in the area since she left the CCAC. Her legal counsel, Waterloo-based Neena Gupta, is asking how there can be accountability in the home-care sector if health care providers aren't able to speak their minds publicly.

Though no date has been set to hear the case, Gupta says the issue is whether a CCAC can stop service providers from speaking freely to the media without its permission. Gupta says her client experienced a "deliberate effort to muzzle legitimate debate."



### What is ONA?

The Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA) is the union representing 57,000 front-line RNs and allied health professionals and more than 12,000 nursing student affiliates providing care in Ontario hospitals, long-term care facilities, public health, the community, industry and clinics.



**Who is Linda Haslam-Stroud, RN?**

ONA President Linda Haslam-Stroud, RN (pictured), is a veteran renal transplant nurse who is an expert spokesperson on a range of issues. Linda is available to comment on everything from workplace violence, patient care, health care policy in Ontario, the flu pandemic, nursing cuts, public health and much more. Simply contact ONA's media relations officer, Sheree Bond, at (416) 964-8833, ext. 2430 if you would like to interview Linda on a health-related issue.

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## PC Party Election Platform Silent on Nurses, *cont'd from page 1*

And, despite promising to increase health care funding in Ontario, the Progressive Conservative party's *changebook* barely mentions nurses.

The *changebook* also promises a "fair deal for the people who are paid by taxes and the people who pay the taxes," leading ONA to question where that leaves nurses.

While promising to improve health care, the PCs detail no plan to retain and recruit scarce RNs to provide that health care.

The previous PC government fired more than 10,000 RNs in the 1990s, then scrambled to hire back as many as possible when it discovered the vital role nurses play in patient care. Premier Mike Harris made the mistake of comparing RNs to hula hoops – thought of fondly but also passé. Perhaps the omission of a plan to ensure adequate nurses for the system during a global nursing shortage was meant to keep voters from remembering those comments...

## Study Finds Evidence of Inferior Care at Private Surgical Clinics

In the public-versus-private health care debate, the issue of quality of care is sometimes lost – and evidence is hard to find. Now, the *Toronto Star* has reported on a new study that concludes that patient care at private weight-loss surgery clinics in Canada is inferior to that in public hospitals ([source](#)).

The study, led by St. Michael's Hospital physician Dr. Chaim Bell, found that while wait times for surgery at private clinics are shorter than in public hospitals, the cost for care is much higher – and the quality of care is inferior in private facilities.

Health reporter Theresa Boyle reports that researchers surveyed 12 private and 18 public hospital-affiliated weight loss clinics across Canada. Forty-two per cent of private clinics performed surgeries without the critical care support found in hospitals. As well, they offered less intensive patient care prior to surgery. Other differences:

- The number of pre-surgical visits (to provide assessments and counseling) differed between public and private facilities. Patients having surgery in public-affiliated clinics averaged 4.3 visits compared with 2.7 visits to the private clinics.
- Pre-screening of patients differed as well. The authors say pre-screening is important to ensure that patients understand the procedure and what will happen to them – the surgery is life-altering. One hundred per cent in the public system are pre-screened, while 75 per cent of private clinic patients are pre-screened.
- Surgical wait times: public: 21 months, private: one month.

The median cost for lapband surgery is \$16,000. The study's authors estimate that about 1,000 lapband procedures are performed in Canada yearly.

## ‘Value the Invaluable’ Campaign a Big Award Winner

We knew that ONA members and the media loved the Ontario Nurses’ Association’s “Value the Invaluable” campaign, and it seems that others do, too.

ONA’s radio, transit shelter and Internet ads have resonated with the public and been praised by members of the media for its innovative and fresh approach to advocacy ([source](#)).

The radio ads won universal praise for their humorous and entertaining approach to reminding us all to value the skills and knowledge of registered nurses (listen to the ads [here](#)).

Now, ONA has won awards from the Canadian Association of Labour Media (CALM), a network of union publications and editors that provides labour-friendly stories and graphics and training for labour communicators.

At the recent CALM Conference held in British Columbia, the campaign won the prestigious **Dennis McGann Stroke-of-Genius Award** for best campaign. It also took home an **Honourable Mention** for best radio ad.

The annual CALM awards recognize excellence in union publications and productions. Entries are judged by independent experts in a variety of categories and classes.

ONA also won CALM awards for **Best Overall Website in Canada** and **Best Flyer or Brochure** for its member-focused *ONA Guide to Local Action*.

# UNDER THE RADAR

## News the Media is Missing



CANADIAN  
FEDERATION  
OF NURSES  
UNIONS

Canadian Nurses Exceeding Patient Expectations:

### The National Patients’ Report Card Gives Nurses an A+

Results of a poll commissioned by the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU) shows that Canadians overwhelmingly approve of the work that nurses are doing – and are very aware of the nursing shortage.

The poll measured how nurses performed in 12 benchmark areas; highlights include:

91%	of patients say	nurses seem comfortable with the equipment and procedures needed for their treatment or care.
88%	of patients say	nurses listen to them carefully and answer their questions.
84%	of patients say	nurses speak to them with respect and make them feel cared for.
84%	of patients say	nurses explain what they’re doing.
83%	of patients say	nurses know and understand their health needs.
82%	of patients say	nurses address their needs quickly.
75%	of patients say	nurses calm their fears or concerns.
74%	of patients say	nurses ensure they don’t wait an “unreasonable” amount of time for their attention.
73%	of patients say	nurses provide them with as much information as possible.
72%	of patients say	nurses perform procedures with professional knowledge.
72%	of patients say	nurses help them understand their medical situation.
64%	of patients say	nurses make them feel like a partner in their treatment decisions.

Interestingly, 34 per cent of patients responding to the poll also said the health facility they used was understaffed with nurses.

The full patients’ report card, media release and additional information is available on the CFNU website at [www.nursesunions.ca](http://www.nursesunions.ca).

## Patients Polled on Nurses’ Job Performance Shows Awareness of Nursing Shortage

Canadians give nurses a great report card on their performance, but they also notice that care declines in health care facilities that are experiencing a nursing shortage.

There was little notice taken by the media when the Canadian Federation of Nurses’ Unions (CFNU) released the results of a poll in which patients were asked to rate what they think of nurses’ performance.

Canadians who’d recently used the health care system were asked to rate their nurses’ performance in 12 categories, including whether the nurse listened to them and understood their health needs, treated them with respect and addressed their needs quickly.

Patients gave nurses an exceedingly good “report card,” with 88 per cent saying nurses listened to them carefully and answered their questions, 84 per cent saying the nurse treated them with respect and cared about them, 83 per cent saying the nurse knew and understood their health needs, and 82 per cent saying the nurse addressed their needs quickly.

Most interesting for nurses is that their performance was so highly rated, even though 34 per cent of patients polled noticed the nursing shortage impacting on patient care and nurses’ workloads.

CFNU President Linda Silas, RN, says the poll shows that Canadian patients “clearly respect and value the care they receive from nurses” and recognize both the superior knowledge – and “caring touch” – that patients need.

Respondents also rated nurses highly for:

- Technical competence;
- Explaining procedures;
- Helping patients understand their condition;
- Quickly addressing patients’ needs.

Full poll results are available at [www.nursesunions.ca](http://www.nursesunions.ca).

## Flu Shot Debate Continues

A strongly worded *Toronto Star* opinion editorial joined other outlets recently in calling for mandatory flu shots for hospital workers.

The piece says that caregivers are “endangering” their patients by neglecting to obtain a flu shot and calls the failure to do so “inexcusable.”

The editorial appeared following a report from Toronto Public Health that showed a decline in vaccination rates for Toronto health care workers.

The editorial made many unsubstantiated claims and concluded that unless health care workers start to get the vaccinations, they’d make the case for flu shots becoming mandatory.

In fact, the Supreme Court has long since ruled that vaccinations can’t be made mandatory – and has said that being forced to have a vaccine constitutes assault.

Laura Lozanski, a Nepean retired nurse, responded to the editorial in a letter to the editor, saying she wanted to “educate” the newspaper on the facts about the flu vaccine ([source](#)).

She wrote of the most current research showing that annual flu shots decrease the body’s natural ability to create its own immunity, that they do not prevent people from getting the flu, and that we may be “coming to the end of being able to develop any new vaccines.”

She argues that flu vaccines should be “reserved for vulnerable populations in certain circumstances” and says health care workers have “had enough of being used as guinea pigs for ‘health’ research.”

This debate has all taken place as news has emerged of two distinct flu viruses that were both present and mixed in a young Toronto-area boy – the first example of this seen in North America.

# Looking for the real story?



## Speak to front-line nurses!

The Ontario Nurses’ Association has a whole host of experts in health care. ONA members work in hospitals, long-term care, public health, the community and industry and can answer your questions as health continues to evolve in this province.

Need a reliable and informed source? Contact ONA.



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FOR MEDIA ONLY:

**Behind the Front Lines** – an electronic newsletter that takes a look at the stories behind the stories. Great background info, insight and a resource for every journalist who writes about health care. E-mail [shereeb@ona.org](mailto:shereeb@ona.org) today to receive your copy.