Workplace Violence:

ONA Finds Court Decision “Sickening”

Ontario Nurses’ Association (ONA) First Vice-President Vicki McKenna says the latest exoneration of a hospital from charges that it failed to keep its workers safe from violence is “sickening” (source).

A judge found Brockville Mental Health Centre’s parent organization not guilty of four of five charges laid against it by the Ministry of Labour, stemming from an October 2014 stabbing of a registered nurse by a patient.

The decision will put more nurses at risk, believes McKenna. She notes that RNs across the province, seeing their employers acquitted of charges, are fearing for their own safety each day.

As the CBC report notes, this is the second time in a year that the Royal Ottawa Health Care Group has escaped conviction on workplace violence charges. That, says McKenna, results in nurses feeling “at risk when they go to work and they think, ‘gee, is it going to be me today?’ It is frightening and it wears people down.”

Workplace violence has been a top priority issue for ONA for years. ONA has launched public awareness and ad campaigns (source), spoken out through the media (source) and was a main participant in a government workplace violence round table (source).

Despite decades of efforts, ONA believes that overcrowded hospitals are contributing to an increase in assaults against nurses and other health-care professionals.

ONA will continue to call for additional measures to keep nurses – and their patients – safe. As McKenna says, “Somehow we have to deal with the situation before someone else gets hurt.”

Hospital CEO Admits Patient Safety Could Be At Risk with More Cuts

In a rare and surprisingly frank comment, the CEO of North Bay Regional Health Centre, Paul Heinrich, has admitted that nursing cuts are more difficult to make and that “only so many positions can be cut before it becomes a safety issue.”

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What is ONA?
The Ontario Nurses’ Association (ONA) is the union representing 64,000 registered nurses and allied health professionals and more than 16,000 nursing student affiliates providing care in Ontario hospitals, long-term care facilities, public health, the community, clinics and industry.

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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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Overcrowding in Ontario Hospitals Continues

Many health-care sector organizations were hopeful that Ontario hospitals would receive an increase in hospital funding of approximately five per cent in this year’s provincial budget (source).

After years of funding freezes, hospitals have fallen farther and farther behind, and closed beds, cut services and gutted RN positions to balance their budgets.

Recently, the media got on board with the story of hospital overcrowding, reporting extensively on patients being provided care in hallways, linen cupboards and meeting rooms (source).

Will the province’s announcement of a 3.1-per-cent increase in hospital funding alleviate overcrowding?

The National Post (source) says no.

With quotes from a woman who spent five days on a gurney in a Brampton hospital and the executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition (OHC), the report naysays the impact of hospital funding as an answer to hallway nursing.

The OHC’s Natalie Mehra says “you can’t continue to have years and years of cuts and then one year before an election, put some money in and pretend everything is OK.”

ONA President Linda Haslam-Stroud said the organization is “cautiously optimistic.”

As she told media, the increase is “a good start. Our hospitals have been starved of funding…and our patients have paid the price as hospitals slashed more than 1,600 RN positions to dangerously low levels.”

Haslam-Stroud has called for multi-year, stable hospital funding and an end to RN cuts. A multi-year health human resources plan is also needed to bring the province’s RN-to-population ratio up to the average in the rest of Canada. Currently, Ontario has the lowest RN-to-population ratio. As repeatedly shown in multiple research studies, the more RNs caring for patients, the fewer complications and fewer deaths there are for these patients.

The Post report says that hospitals required a two-per-cent increase for inflation, two per cent to account for additional population growth an aging, and a one-per-cent increase for increased patient demand.
ONA President Honoured with Lifetime Achievement Award

ONA’s 64,000 registered nurses and allied health professionals, as well as its 16,000 nursing student affiliates know that President Linda Haslam-Stroud is a committed, passionate and tireless advocate for them.

Now, Haslam-Stroud has been honoured with a Lifetime Achievement Award from another nursing organization (source).

The Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario (RNAO) has presented Haslam-Stroud with the award in recognition of her leadership in nursing. The group particularly praised her for spearheading the 2015 campaign, “The Truth Hurts” to stem the gutting of RN care in Ontario hospitals.

Many members of the media have experienced Linda’s dedication to being a responsive and eloquent spokesperson on behalf of the nurses the union represents. Linda always endeavours to answer media inquiries as quickly as possible, and has even done media interviews from the back of a snowmobile on a Sunday afternoon.

College of Nurses Puts a Negative Spin on a Good-News Story

The scope of practice of Nurse Practitioners is expanding.

The College of Nurses (CNO) has put a negative spin on a good-news story for Ontario Nurse Practitioners (NPs) and their patients.

Recent amendments to Nursing Act regulations will now allow an NP to prescribe controlled substances, with the completion of additional education.

ONA President Linda Haslam-Stroud says this good news story is being given a negative connotation by the College – the regulatory body for nurses in the province.

The CNO plans to add a note beside each NP listed on its website who has not yet completed the additional education as “entitled to practice with restriction.”

As Haslam-Stroud has pointed out to both the College and the Health Minister, the term “restriction” carries strong negative connotations and suggests that the nurse has done something wrong or somehow fallen short in an aspect of their practice.

“This is a positive development,” says Haslam-Stroud. “Our NPs who choose to prescribe controlled substances and therefore complete the additional education should be commended and receive positive recognition on the public register. NPs who choose not to engage in prescribing controlled substances should not be stigmatized or punished by the College.”

As she says in her latest podcast (www.ona.org/podcast), patients don’t always need to be going to a physician for a number of illnesses or health issues they are experiencing. Instead of this being a positive, says Haslam-Stroud, the CNO is going to be saying the NPs who have not completed the additional education have a restricted practice.

It is especially vital to Haslam-Stroud that the CNO stops this practice as in future, RNs will see their scope of practice expanded as well, and “we’re not going to have 80,000 or 90,000 registered nurses in Ontario that have not taken the additional education being labelled as having a restriction on their practice.”
Media Outlet Decries Corporate, Union Influence on Government

There was much media commentary when the Ontario government changed the rules on union and corporate political donations (source).

To read some of the coverage, Ontarians could believe that unions influence government policy decisions to an astonishing degree. Yet few media outlets took a critical look at how much private corporations truly influence policy.

As the largest nurses’ union in Ontario, ONA does not participate in political fundraisers, nor does it make political donations. It is a member of the Working Families Coalition in order to advocate for government that will support publicly delivered and funded health care.

In B.C., with its provincial election underway, it was interesting to see a report in the Georgia Strait (source) warning of the “false equivalence of comparing corporate donations to union contributions.”

As Charlie Smith reports, there was a “great deal of emphasis on union donations to the B.C. NDP” during a leaders’ debate, yet less so on the tens of millions in corporate donations to the B.C. Liberal government.

The “mainstream media has not focused nearly as much attention on how this has influenced public policies ranging from liquor reforms to environmental regulations to business-incorporation rules that place a premium on investors’ secrecy,” he writes.

Smith writes that there is a “false equivalency” being made between union and corporate donations.

Unions have a history of standing up for local workers and promoting government contracts” going to provincial workers. They also, he says, have an impressive record in defending public health care and education.

Corporate boards, by contrast, have a fiduciary duty to serve shareholders. They also want to pay the least amount of corporate taxes possible, starving provincial governments of revenue and undermining the delivery of public services.

He believes that when corporations have disproportionate influence over governments, child poverty soars and homelessness skyrockets. He asks provincial political commentators to acknowledge the benefits that organized labour has brought.

He also says that “union leaders are not the equivalent of greedy and often ruthless corporate fat cats who collect annual compensation in the seven or eight figures” and that “anyone who even hints that they’re birds of a feather is being far too loose with the truth.”
‘First Responders Day’ Marked but Most Nurses Still Excluded from PTSD Legislation

May 1 was proclaimed First Responders Day in Ontario in 2013, and was marked across Ontario again this year.

Municipalities thanked “first responders,” including police officers, fire fighters, nurses, paramedics, doctors, and emergency medical technicians.

The irony for ONA members is that despite the fact that the province included nurses in its proclamation of First Responders Day, it has yet to include the majority of nurses in its PTSD presumptive legislation which would enable nurses suffering from PTSD to easily access Workplace Safety and Insurance Board benefits.

Nurses know that they have a higher risk of PTSD due to the nature of their work, and should be covered by this legislation. Apparently the province knew they were first responders in 2013 – making the omission of nurses from the legislation even more evident.