



September 2, 2015

OPEN LETTER TO PREMIER WYNNE AND DR. HOSKINS

“The tale of a deflated and disheartened physician”

Dear Premier Wynne and Health Minister Hoskins:

I have been a comprehensive, rural family physician for over six years. In addition to being a full time family physician, in my early career, I worked frequent shifts in the Emergency Rooms of local hospitals, and enthusiastically contributed countless unpaid hours to the betterment of our healthcare system. I was the Lead Physician of our nationally recognized, award-winning, Central Hasting Family Health Team. I was also heavily involved in the pioneering of local health team integration hubs, even before they became officially known and endorsed as “Health Links.”

I was once an optimistic, energized, and passionate physician. I loved being a physician. I loved contributing to the vision of an ever-improving healthcare system.

Things have since changed, unfortunately.

Whether it was your intention or not, you have successfully beat the morale and enthusiasm right out of me. My sense of professional satisfaction is dangerously low. I am sure that I am not the only physician to whom these changes in spirit apply. This is quite a counter-productive morale for the doctors of Ontario to have.

I certainly appreciate the fiscal crisis that the Ontario Government has been facing. I recognize there is an extreme budgetary mismatch between supply and demand. However, cutting straight percentage points from a budget was never the answer. The healthcare system needs reform. There is waste. There are inefficiencies. There are priority ‘needs’ versus secondary ‘wants.’ Surely, we could have worked constructively to address these concerns.

Instead of working collaboratively, though, your government chose to impose harsh, unilateral, non-negotiable cuts to Ontario’s physicians, most of which severely hurt *family physicians* specifically. What is more, you have imposed an arbitrary, non-transparent, “Hard Cap” on the physicians (a maximum annual limit for which the government will compensate doctors for their services). The ultimate effects of your inevitable “claw backs” that go over this Hard Cap remain to be truly realized by doctors - *and patients*.

Your government has refused to return to meaningful collaboration with Ontario’s physicians since the beginning of 2015. Physicians cannot strike because we are bound by our obligation to patients, our morals, the laws of essential services, and



our regulatory College. Your government has taken this for granted and used it to hold physicians hostage. This makes the lack of fair bargaining and collaboration all the more disheartening.

As if to rub salt in wounds, in a supposed environment of fiscal constraint, you have gone on to negotiate *raises* for the likes teachers and hydro workers! Such optics are infuriatingly frustrating and further crush physician morale.

The irony in all of this is that, had you continued in honest, fair collaboration with physicians, I might have been able to *temporarily* accept the small cuts to compensation that you sought to impose. Realizing the fiscal realities, I could have appreciated the need for financial conservation for the ultimate betterment and sustainability of the healthcare system. This, of course, would have only been a *temporary* imposition while we collaborated to eliminate waste and improve outcomes within the system.

However, you did no such thing. You have not collaborated. You have imposed unilateral, non-negotiable actions against Ontario's doctors. You have demonstrated a total lack of good faith. You have refused to return to meaningful discussions with Ontario's doctors. The manner of disrespect and aloof disregard in which you and your government have treated Ontario's hard-working physicians is unforgivable.

Bridges have been burned, unfortunately. A once optimistic, enthusiastic, engaged physician is now left deflated and cynical. I fear that I am not alone - and that is definitely *not* a good thing for Ontario's healthcare.

Sincerely,

Dr. Adam Stewart