

Hamilton Medical Reform Group

NEWSLETTER.

Health Care Under Attack

Almost every day , stories of bed closures , industrial disease and accidents , and more doctors opting out of O.H.I.P. appear in the Press . Headlines such as ' Death of woman while waiting for hospital ' only show the tip of the iceberg though . Underneath is a disturbing trend towards a widescale reduction in the quality and accessibility of Health Care , the effects and frustrations of which are being increasingly felt by the people of Hamilton .

During a period of Economic Recession , Health and Welfare budgets are amongst the first to be cut . Accordingly , the Davis Government has progressively reduced the percentage of the Gross Product spent on Health . This led to the closure of 1216 hospital beds in 1976 , and the planned closure of another 5621 , longer waiting lists and often inadequate staffing .

Moreover , the money saved has not been redirected into badly-needed alternatives like Chronic Care Facilities , Day Care Services , Preventative programmes or Community Clinics . Many smaller projects , the Rape Crisis Centres , for example , are in imminent danger of closing , due to lack of funds . Furthermore , there has been no move towards providing much-needed O.H.I.P. coverage for drug and dental costs .

In fact , while the service provided deteriorates , the cost to the consumer continues to increase . A chronic care deterrent fee of \$9.80 a day has just been introduced and O.H.I.P. rates jumped by 18% last year (and are scheduled to rise again in the fall) . Meanwhile , a blind eye is being turned to acid rain , mercury poisoning and flagrant violations of pollution control laws even though the extra disease caused by industrial factors will only add to the future burdens on the Health Services .

At the same time , the Government has been able to find enough money to give \$68 million to Ford , put \$200 million in a hand-out fund for investors and exempt mining companies from taxes on profits up to \$250,000 . As the Health needs of Ontario suffer , corporate profits this quarter are higher than ever .

This situation has met with increasing dissatisfaction from the general public . Citizens groups , together with the Labour Movement have organised coalitions to oppose the cutbacks and other threats to our Health Service . A demonstration of 1,000 people was held at Queens Park in June and another is planned for the fall . Yet , until now , the existing medical organisations have displayed a seemingly indifferent attitude to the gradual erosion of the quality of Health Care in Ontario .

Medical Reform Group

It was against this background that a number of progressive physicians got together earlier this year . There was a strong feeling on their part that Health Care needed more , not less , money and that cutbacks and opting out were undermining the principle of universal access to Health Care . It was also felt that more emphasis should be placed on Preventative Medicine (especially in the area of Industrial Health) and greater recognition should be given to the Roles of all Health Workers .

The need was apparent for them to unite and form a body that could add it's voice to thos in the Community already engaged in the struggle to preserve the right to Health . By means of public forums , media campaigns and taking initiatives at a local level , it would bring these issues home to the people of Ontario and pressure the Government into changing it's spending priorities .

Equally important was the need for a group of physicians who would take an active stand on the hazards posed to health by Industrial and Environmental factors . It was with these goals that the Medical Reform Group was born .

The Toronto Meeting

A province - wide meeting for all M.R.G. members was held in Toronto on May 26th. , and was attended by 58 physicians and medical students (28 of them from Hamilton) . In the morning , workshops covered a lot of ground ; FINANCING OF HEALTH CARE and the potential effects of cutbacks and opting out , PHYSICIAN EDUCATION including criteria for entry , THE DECOLONISATION OF MEDICINE and greater involvement of other Health Workers and various aspects of OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH . ..

This was followed by a plenum session , where three guiding principles for the M.R.G. were presented and ratified . These are :

1. The universal access of every person to high quality , appropriate health care must be guaranteed . The Health Care system must be administered in a manner that precludes any monetary or other deterrent to equal care .
2. Health Care workers , including physicians , should seek out and recognise the social , economic , occupational and environmental causes of disease , and be directly involved in their eradication .
3. The health care system should be structured in a manner in which the equally valuable contribution of all health care workers is recognised . Both patients and health workers should have a direct say in determining the setting in which health care is provided and in resource allocation .

Following this meeting , groups now meet regularly in Hamilton and Toronto, along with active individuals in Sudbury and Ottawa , to examine M.R.G. policies.

A Fall meeting has been arranged to discuss and formulate policy around a number of current concerns .A constitution will be ratified and a steering committee elected . And as interest has developed in other parts of Canada , the foundations are being laid for a possible country-wide organisation .

Did You Know?

- * A Canadian worker is killed on the job every two hours of every workday . And for every death as a result of an accident , there are an estimated 7 deaths caused by job-related illnesses .
- * Every 19 seconds a worker suffers a disabling injury .
- * At least 10,000 Canadians die each year as a result of workplace exposure to carcinogens .
- * An estimated 28% of ALL workers develop a job-related illness (including dermatitis , hearing loss and respiratory complaints .
(O.F.L. statistics 1979)

AND IN HAMILTON

- * Working in Stelco's coke ovens for only 5 years gives one a 2½ likelihood of developing lung cancer . And 10 times for those working on top of the batteries .
- * Last year there were 2 accidental deaths at Stelco , and 716 lost-time accidents .

On The Horizon

Although still in an embryonic stage , it is going to be important for us to start publicising our stands on some of the above-mentioned issues . We will also be building links with other groups and Unions who are active around issues of common concern .A lot of energy will go into educating ourselves . This will be largely through our Research Committees , a regular Newsletter and monthly meetings when we'll be examining topics as diverse as the Workman's Compensation Act , Existing Community Clinics , Industrial carcinogens and Health Care delivery in other countries .

To increase our effectiveness in Hamilton , we hope that other physicians who share our concerns and ideas will become involved with the work of the group . To this end , we'd like to invite you to an open meeting of the Hamilton M.R.G. , to be held on WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 19th. in the AUDITORIUM AT ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL at 7.30 p.m. You will have a chance to meet us , find out more about our organisation , and join us in the fight to preserve the rights to health of the people of Ontario .

" Let us take the profit , the private economic profit , out of medicine and purify our profession of rapacious individualism . Let us make it disgraceful to enrich ourselves at the expense of the misery of our fellow man . Let us organise ourselves so that we can no longer be exploited by our politicians . Let us redefine medical ethics , not as a code of professional etiquette between doctors , but as a code of fundamental morality and justice between medicine and the people ."

NORMAN BETHUNE

(address to C.M.A. in 1932)

THE M.R.G. HAS FORMED A WORK GROUP
TO INVESTIGATE INDUSTRIAL DISEASE
AND ACCIDENTS IN HAMILTON . ALL
DATA WILL BE GRATEFULLY RECEIVED .

MEETING

Wed. Sept.19 at 7:30

St. Joseph's Hospital
Auditorium A

For further information contact Nick Kates (Newsletter Editor) at 627-2073