

Bill 8: Less Accountability & Key Inflation Ignored

What is Bill 8? Introduced November 17, the Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act sets up an Ontario Health Council, regulates extra-billing by physicians and introduces Accountability agreements to hospitals, long-term care facilities and community care access centres.

What's wrong with accountability? Communities that expect their local health facility to be accountable to their communities will be shocked to find that with Bill 8 all of the key decisions are now made by the Ministry of Health in Toronto. Hospital and long-term care CEOs and Boards of Directors will now be forced to enter into "accountability agreements" with the Minister in order to get funding.

In British Columbia, where these agreements are in use, all CEOs had to reduce their support and administration budgets by 7% last year.

What's wrong with cutting support services?

Support services were restructured, cut and downsized extensively during the 1990's, especially by the Hospital Restructuring Commission.

The numbers of support staff working in hospitals have been cut by 12,000 since 1995. Hospital support service costs have risen only 12% in the last decade, while drug costs, for example, are up 200% in only 5 years.

Support staff are having trouble keeping Ontario's hospitals working because of the minimal staffing levels. The fact that the SARS virus could live for 30 days on an unwashed surface at the North York General Hospital suggests that there aren't enough cleaners in Ontario hospitals, for example.

What is driving up health care spending ? Drugs have gone from \$800 million in 1995 to \$2.6 billion in 2003. Drugs, the doctors' fee for service billing system and profits to corporations delivering homecare, lab and long-term care services are driving up health care spending. But these forces are ignored in Bill 8. So health care spending will continue to rise.

What can I do? Call your MPP and ask that the government pull Bill 8 and start over. The government needs to rethink its approach to health care.