

Medical Officers of Health are Frontline Workers

On behalf of the Board of Health, I would like to express my significant disappointment in MPP Dave Smith for his recent comments in the media that public health officials are only “fear-mongering” and “trying to salvage their \$300,000-a-year jobs”. To imply that Medical Officers of Health are not frontline workers reveals a serious lack of awareness of what their public health role is. Our local Medical Officer of Health is not a bureaucrat but delivers direct healthcare to the community on a daily basis. Dr. Salvaterra is available and on-call 24/7 to respond to requests from emergency room doctors or family physicians regarding the health of their patients, and she assists and supports public health nurses and inspectors to address outbreaks and health hazards, day or night. For example, last year when notified on a Saturday morning by the hospital of a severe influenza outbreak in a local retirement home, our Medical Officer of Health was able to secure provincial Tamiflu stockpiles in less than 18 hours, and went into the home to assess and prescribe the antiviral medication herself to over 100 residents on Sunday morning, effectively putting an end to the outbreak.


Dr. Salvaterra is also the Medical Director of the Sexual Health Clinic. This means that she not only sees patients herself to diagnose and treat for sexually transmitted infections and provide contraception, but the nurses act under her Medical Directives to provide these services even when there are no doctors on site. These nurses consult with her whenever required so that they can provide timely care to patients. To state “you can have five public health nurses for the cost of one Dr. Salvaterra” is an insult to both professions by implying either can operate without the other because both are absolutely necessary to deliver community healthcare.

Our Medical Officer of Health’s frontline role goes far beyond the care she delivers as a doctor. She also responds and meets with concerned citizens or community partners on public health matters, and she speaks directly to local councils, the media and community groups on public health concerns. She consistently makes herself available to the local community as is evidenced by her full slate of speaking engagements throughout the County and City. Medical Officers of Health also advocate for their communities at the provincial level. For example, Dr. Salvaterra requested a meeting with our provincial Chief Medical Officer of Health as early as 2012 to advocate for a provincial Naloxone distribution strategy to address the growing opioid crisis. Under her watch and her leadership Peterborough was one of the first communities to offer Naloxone to people at risk. Our early adoption of Naloxone was then enhanced, with PRHC becoming one of the first Emergency Departments in Ontario to provide Naloxone kits to patients.

When one considers the 24/7 nature of their work, the incredible responsibility they carry for the health of hundreds of thousands of people, and their unique combination of leadership, medical expertise, and community development skills, I’d say Medical Officers of Health are worth every penny.

Kathryn Wilson, Chair, Board of Peterborough Public Health

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