



July 11, 2006

Hon. George Smitherman
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Hepburn Block, 10th Floor
80 Grosvenor St.
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

Dear Minister Smitherman,

We are writing to you about *Choosing Quality, Rewarding Experience: Ontario's Response to the Caplan Report on Homecare*. We support your Ministry's commitment and attention to the home care sector.

RNAO and CHNIG recognize that personal support workers (PSWs) are integral to providing a comprehensive spectrum of care for Ontario's population. Compassionate, dedicated, and hard-working PSWs provide an essential service to many individuals. They assist clients in a variety of settings with routine activities of daily living such as laundry, housekeeping, shopping, feeding, bathing, dressing, transferring, and continence care. We believe that the announcement of an increase in wage rates for PSWs is an important step in stabilizing the home-care workforce.

We also applaud your commitment to improving CCAC procurement policies by allowing contracts to be renewed for up to nine years. We believe this measure will contribute both to improved stability in the home-care workforce, which will increase continuity of care, and continuity of caregivers for clients.

Your Ministry recognizes that the demand for home health care is expected to grow exponentially as our population ages. As a result, the demands for home health nursing are expected to grow. Regrettably, however, the home-care sector lost 27% of its nursing workforce between 1998 and 2004 (Home Health Nurses in Ontario Fact Sheet: Nursing Research Unit, 2006). There were fewer full-time home health nurses in 2004 than in 1993 (Home Health Nurses in Ontario Fact Sheet: Nursing Research Unit, 2006). Consequently, the recruitment and retention of home health nurses is vital to the sustainability of home care.

We understand that the Ministry believes that centralized pre-qualification processes, longer contracts, and preferred provider designations will contribute to home-care nursing strategies (page 11). Given the need for home health nurses, we are committed to working with government to operationalize these contributions.

As nurses, our first priority is ensuring quality of care. We agree with the Ministry that there is a need for research, information, and performance measures to improve the quality of home-care services.

In the document, the Ministry committed to identifying and sharing best practices and using them as benchmarks. We fully support this commitment. However, in order to operationalize this commitment, a number of further steps will be required:

- Setting timelines for the creation of the committee responsible for developing performance indicators and definitions;
- Providing the committee with clear direction to determine which outcomes effectively measure care provided, and how to measure them;
- Identifying which parties are responsible for obtaining and measuring these outcome indicators; and,
- Providing funding for this data collection.

We believe that the government's commitment to a Chair to promote research in home care will be crucial to this process, and support that commitment. Moreover, we believe the government should operationalize this commitment by endowing this Chair.

We understand that the Ministry believes that the preferred provider designation will support the home care nursing strategy. In order to operationalize this support, a number of additional steps will be required:

- Striking a committee, and providing it with a deadline for determination of the criteria for the preferred provider status; and,
- Committing to a timeline for implementation of the preferred provider status in the RFP process.

Minister, we urge you to make the following criteria mandatory for determining preferred provider status as they have a direct impact on quality of care, continuity of care, and continuity of care providers:

- Percentage of full-time employment;
- Length and depth of orientation, levels of training, supervision, and depth of clinical support;
- Educational development spending;
- Turnover rates; and,
- Overtime hours.

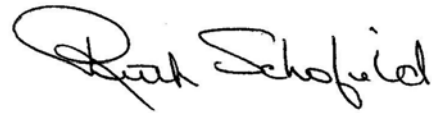
While we support the Ministry's emphasis on the sector's need for information technology, we are concerned that the emphasis is misplaced. The Ministry has emphasized the importance of home-care IT development in facilitating the coordination of home-care services. However, the need for IT investment at the agency level is enormous and will have a large impact on care provision.

We know that improvements in home care are essential to the success of Ontario's health-care transformation process. We look forward to working with you to build on the progress the government of Ontario has made to date on improving access to services for Ontarians. We look forward to meeting with you and your officials very soon to proceed with the essential next steps in this process.

With warm regards,

Handwritten signature of Doris Grinspun in black ink, featuring a stylized cursive script with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Doris Grinspun, RN, MSN, PhD(c), O.Ont.
Executive Director, RNAO

Handwritten signature of Ruth Schofield in black ink, featuring a cursive script with a large initial 'R' and a long horizontal flourish.

Ruth Schofield, RN, MSc(T)
President, CHNIG