

Ontario Liberals Shortchanging Health Care

Medical Reform Group

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The Medical Reform Group today condemned Dalton McGuinty's Ontario Liberal government for its failure to spend dedicated health care dollars where they belong.

"The Ontario government is following in the footsteps of its Conservative predecessors in betraying the people of Ontario," said MRG spokesperson Dr. Gordon Guyatt. "The premiers promised to spend the federal health transfers on health. McGuinty promised to spend the health care premium on health. It isn't happening."

The MRG is responding to an analysis released earlier this week by health economist Armine Yalnizyan. The province of Ontario received increases in federal funding for health of almost \$3 billion for the 2004-5 budget. They collected over 1.5 billion in new taxes from their health premium. But they are spending only an additional 3.3 billion on health care, a shortfall of \$1.6 billion.

"In the face of an additional \$1.6 billion in unspent, dedicated health care dollars, Health Minister George Smitherman's decision to choke hospitals and lay off nurses is outrageous," said another MRG spokesperson, Dr. Ahmed Bayoumi.

Yalnizyan's calculations suggest that over the next four years the Liberal plans will result in a total shortfall of \$9.5 billion dollars between dedicated health income and what the Liberals plan to spend.

Where is that money going? Effectively, the Liberals are using it to balance their budget.

"Given their unwillingness to reverse some of the Harris/Eves tax cuts, this means the Liberals are behaving exactly as the Conservatives did," Bayoumi continued. "They are using health care dollars to fund tax cuts. And the result will be unnecessary grief for health care in Ontario."

McGuinty's behaviour should also give the federal government a strong message that they need to tie health care dollars to specific provincial expenditures, as Roy Romanow's report suggested.

"Health care dollars should go toward ensuring an adequate supply of nurses, modernizing our health care system through information technology, and jump-starting primary care reform," Guyatt concluded. "Governments shouldn't be claiming a commitment to health care when they don't mean it."