

Health care we deserve]



By Nate Smelle

At one time or another in our lives, we all find ourselves in need of health care. Whether waiting in a doctor's office for a routine check up, or being rushed into an emergency room to receive urgent care, all it takes is one injury or ailment to gain a firsthand understanding of the benefits of public health care. While faced with a public health crisis of unprecedented proportions during the COVID-19 pandemic over the past three years, our understanding of the importance of such essential services has been growing exponentially.

For some of us that is. For others, the crisis appears not to have inspired an increased awareness of our public health care system. Instead, for the majority of 'leaders' elected to represent our interests in terms of health care, they have used this crisis as an opportunity to allow privately owned companies profit financially off of an already underfunded system.

So why is it Ontario's Premier Doug Ford and his team of Conservative Members of Provincial Parliament would want to take advantage of the misfortunes of Ontarians by privatizing services currently offered through the publicly funded health care system?

Could it be that they are more concerned with protecting the profits of their corporate donors than they are with the interests of Ontarians? Wasn't Ford's biggest campaign promise to govern 'For the people'?

Perhaps it is our fault as voters for not asking Ford to clarify which 'people' he would govern for. In case you are still wondering which 'people' he meant when he first began selling his snake oil in 2018, let's look at a few of the services that are now 'Open for Business' in Ontario.

Without insurance in the United States, the cost of a hip replacement typically ranges from \$31,000 USD to \$45,000 USD for the surgery alone. At the going exchange rate as of press time Tuesday, in Canada that means those in the market for a new hip would pay anywhere from \$41,897.43 to \$60,815.54. For those looking to treat themselves or surprise a loved one with a new knee for their birthday, count on setting aside another \$20,270.11 (\$15,000) to \$94,598.28 (\$70,000).

If such privileges are a little outside of your budget, maybe a potentially life-saving diagnosis 'as long as you have the funds available to pay for the medicine and/or treatment you need following your diagnosis' is more in your price range. Or, for only \$405.27 CAD (\$300 USD) to \$4,424.44. (\$3,280) you can spend your time relaxing in a CT scanner.

Now the Devil's advocate might argue that by allowing those who can afford to pay for such essential services to do so, would open up spots for those who can't afford the highest quality health care to access them within the public health care system. However, for

this to be true that would require our publicly-funded health care system to already be operating fully staffed and adequately funded; which as we know is not the case. Furthermore, knowing that the 'best' doctors, surgeons, nurses, etc. can make a lot more money providing for-profit health care, what will this mean for the quality of care currently being provided for free ? minus the contribution we make by paying taxes ? through our publicly-funded system?

To raise awareness of the degradation of Ontario's publicly-funded health care system, and call on the Ford government to provide 'Better Staffing, Better Wages and Better Care,' members of Ontario Nurses Association and their allies have planned a province-wide demonstration of solidarity on Feb. 23. Scheduled to take place outside hospitals and Conservative MPPs' offices, the direct action is meant to show ONA's 'unified voice and commitment to achieving a fair deal for Ontario's nurses' ... the same frontline health care workers Premier Ford paid lip service to at the peak of the pandemic, when he identified them as 'heroes.'

When it comes to honouring those who serve us in such a vital manner, someone needs to let the Premier and all those passing themselves off as 'leaders' that kind words of appreciation mean nothing without actions to back them up. Otherwise, if we continue to allow those we elect to give priority to profits over people, we will certainly get the government, and the quality of health care that we deserve.

For those who believe that we deserve the best quality health care possible, the picket will take place in Bancroft at the intersection of Station Street and Hastings Street North from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Thursday, Feb. 23.