

For the 13th consecutive year, RNs converge on Queen's Park to provide MPPs with an important reminder of the connection between nurses, better health outcomes, and reduced system costs.

BY MELISSA DI COSTANZO



NDP Leader  
Andrea Horwath

# ADVOCACY

**IN** February, Ontario's Liberal government received advice from economist Don Drummond on how and where to trim spending in the public sector to address the province's increasingly challenging financial situation. The release of Drummond's recommendations – contained in what many refer to as his austerity report – was well timed with RNAO's annual visit to Queen's Park on March 1. Many of his proposed recommendations for savings in health care are in line with what RNAO has been saying for years, including allowing nurses to work to their full scope. In fact, RNAO was saying as much when it met with Drummond last September as one of the first stakeholders to provide insight and perspective as he started his research for the government. The release of his report provided a springboard for conversations between the 150 nursing and nursing student leaders and the record 71 MPPs who agreed to meet with them to get ideas on how to strengthen publicly funded, not-for-profit health care.

Each politician attending the *13th Annual Day at Queen's Park* received a copy of *Advocating for Vibrant Communities*, a set of briefing notes outlining the policy priorities and positions of RNAO.



# IN ACTION

Among the issues up for discussion: enabling RNs in all sectors to practise to their full scope; increasing the supply of RNs; increasing the share of RNs working full-time to reach the 70 per cent target by 2015; funding for 50 new nurse practitioner-led clinics; and the expansion of existing NP-led clinics. Among the key health-care priorities nurses asked MPPs to contemplate: safeguarding publicly funded, not-for-profit health care; utilizing best practice guidelines to deliver high-quality, evidence-based care; and ensuring every Ontarian has access to a primary care provider.

MPPs, including eight cabinet ministers, met in small group settings with RNs who were prepared to press demands that will make the health system more efficient and cost-effective, and address social and environmental determinants of health.

Health Minister Deb Matthews, Progressive Conservative Leader Tim Hudak, PC Health Critic Elizabeth Witmer and NDP Leader Andrea Horwath spoke to the group throughout the day. With an opportunity to ask questions following most of the presentations, nurses raised important concerns on issues that resonate with the profession. In her speech, Horwath cautioned RNs to be wary of the short-term fixes proposed by Drummond. "We

## EXCITING ANNOUNCEMENT CAPS OFF QP DAY

On March 1, Minister of Health Deb Matthews announced funding for a new database that will help to measure the effectiveness of clinical best practice guidelines. "I'm very happy to share with this House some news that I shared with the nurses this morning," she told members of the legislative assembly during question period. "Our government is partnering with the RAO in funding an initiative called the NQuIRE Initiative. NQuIRE will establish a central database of nursing-sensitive indicators for RAO's clinical best practice guidelines. These guidelines have been translated into multiple languages and are improving care right around this planet. This new program, NQuIRE, will play a significant role in understanding the full impact of RAO's best practice guidelines program on quality of care for the people of Ontario." The news was greeted with applause by members of all three parties.

## MEETING WITH AN MPP: UP CLOSE AND POLITICAL

There were dozens of small group meetings with MPPs during RNAO's 13th Annual Day at Queen's Park. RNJ sat in and observed as Cabinet Minister Linda Jeffrey, whose portfolio includes seniors, met with three members and one of RNAO's policy analysts to discuss Ontario's aging population. Here's what happened...

**Thirty minutes:** that's how long Paula Manuel, Alisha Aggarwal, Melissa Northwood and Sara Clemens have to communicate RNAO's key messages to Liberal MPP Linda Jeffrey.

They're hoping to ask how the government will alleviate financial pressures on seniors. "We have to be efficient (with our time)," Manuel notes as they prepare for the visit the evening before. The others nod in agreement: they've done this before.

Eighteen hours later, the group is seated in Jeffrey's office at Queen's Park. After introductions, Manuel says: "we're interested in your thoughts and vision about what the Liberals are going to do to better integrate (continuity of care) for seniors." Jeffrey notes her primary seniors' portfolio responsibility is with the *Retirement Homes Act (RHA)*. She is working with stakeholders to move regulations under the legislation one step closer to being passed.

RNAO is one of those stakeholders, and in May 2010 made a submission on the *RHA* to the Standing Committee on Social Policy. The association called for a cap on the health services that can be provided by retirement homes, and effective oversight and accountability to be provided by the new regulatory authority.

Manuel asks: "Are we (nurses) helping you enough?"

Jeffrey admits she doesn't "...know what RNAO's position is on the *Retirement Homes Act*," but will follow up. She says she'd like to get a sense of nurses' concerns: "I encourage you and your members to drop an email, or keep in contact."

Jeffrey briefly chats about the value of collaborating with stakeholders in her riding (Brampton-Springdale), and Manuel makes a mental note to take the minister's contact information to Norma Nicholson, RNAO's region 4 representative and a nurse in that riding. Manuel shifts the focus and asks for an update on the Liberal committee that was to have been assembled to discuss minimum wage in preparation for the 2012 budget. It's not moving forward at the moment, Jeffrey replies.

Before everyone knows it, the meeting is ready to wrap up, and Jeffrey repeats that she is "very interested" in having an ongoing conversation with RNAO about the seniors portfolio and the *RHA*.

After bidding goodbye, the nurses gather in the hallway. Everyone is excited that this MPP wants access to nurses' expertise, and is interested in following up. "She doesn't (seem) to care about (political stripes)," says Aggarwal earnestly. "It's about people for her. It's about community."

To read reactions from members who sat in on meetings with NDP and Conservative MPPs, visit [www.RNAO.org/QPDay](http://www.RNAO.org/QPDay).



Don Drummond speaks to nurses in March

have to make sure that we are not looking, for example, to the private sector to be more involved in our health-care system," she said. "That is a short-term fix that will cause us long-term problems, and will erode our health-care system." RNAO has vocally opposed Drummond's recommendation to consider tendering specialist services to 'private, for-profit entities,' because such a move will steer the province towards health-care privatization.

Examining two-tier health care is something Matthews is not open to, she said during her address. "On my watch, we're going to build the continuum of care at the community. We're going to focus on excellence. We're going to focus on evidence. We're going to get the best value for every dollar we spend on health care," she said. "I cannot do that without the support of nurses."

Scope of practice was one of the hottest topics at the event. Paul-André Gauthier, region 11 board representative, stepped up to the microphone to speak to Matthews after her address. He expressed his concern that nurses and nurse practitioners in primary care are not working to their full capacity. "We have to make sure RNs and nurse practitioners are doing much better in improving access to services," he said. "I hear you loud and clear," responded Matthews.

"Expanding the scope of practice for nurses...that's just common sense and smart health care," Hudak said to applause during his speech.

Claudia Mariano, president of the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario, an RNAO interest group, spoke about NP-led clinics that are at capacity, and asked Hudak if his party would assist in securing more NPs per clinic (six, as opposed to four). She also asked about adding more RNs and RPNs. Doing this will allow NPs to take on more patients who are waiting for primary care providers.

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NDP LEADER **ANDREA HORWATH**

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HEALTH MINISTER **DEB MATTHEWS**

Expanding the scope of practice for nurses...that’s just common sense and smart health care.”

CONSERVATIVE LEADER **TIM HUDAK**



Conservative MPP Toby Barrett (top, centre), NDP MPP Rosario Marchese (above, right), and Liberal MPP (and nurse) Soo Wong (below, centre) were among the many politicians who met with nurses and nursing students in small group sessions. (Below, left) Katie Dilworth, President of RNAO’s Community Health Nurses’ Initiatives Group, was one of many members with questions following Deb Matthews’ keynote address.





Nursing students from across Ontario attended RNAO's Annual Day at Queen's Park to get a taste of the political advocacy of the association. They participated in the small group meetings with MPPs, and had the opportunity to witness the raucous behaviour of provincial politicians during question period in the Legislative Assembly.

Hudak, who took notes throughout, said he appreciated Mariano's question, and mentioned RNAO CEO Doris Grinspun and President David McNeil have raised this issue with the party. "I think we need to expand the scope of practice for nurses, and better utilize nurse practitioners in the province of Ontario," he said. "I think it's sensible."

Speaking specifically to NP-led clinics and NPs working on family health teams, Hudak said: "How do we get the best bang for our buck? What's going to be in the best interest of the patient at the end of the day (in terms of) affordability and the limited envelope we have?" Expanding the use of NPs, whether through the clinics, or through stronger roles on family health teams, is something Hudak said he supports.

For the first time ever, participants of RNAO's Annual Day at Queen's Park were able to fill the seats of the Legislative Assembly for question period, a time for the opposition parties to hold the government to account. RNs leaned forward in their seats and listened with both attentiveness and surprise as MPPs traded barbs over Ornge, the province's scandal-plagued air ambulance service.

Rachel Schrijver, RNAO's region 6 policy and



#### TOP TWEETS

"Thank you @RNAO for your work. #Ontario's nurses are the world's best nurses. We're proud of all you do. #onpoli" @Deb\_Matthews



"@RNAO really enjoyed being there, thanks for having me" @timhudak



"The Legislature welcome the RNAO; thanks to RNs for your dedication + hard work in providing health care" @SooWongMPP

To watch videos of Health Minister Deb Matthews and the party leaders, and to see Don Drummond's speech to assembly members on March 2, visit [www.RNAO.org/QPDay](http://www.RNAO.org/QPDay).

political action representative, was in one of those seats and said she was pleased to hear NDP Health Critic France Gélinas ask Matthews about the ministry's plan to address the ongoing structural issues in nurse practitioner-led clinics. "I can absolutely undertake to work with RNAO and with the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario, as we have done in the past, to continue the work to strengthen this new model of care," responded Matthews. "Will we need to continue to improve that model? Absolutely."

In terms of the political landscape going forward, President McNeil and CEO Grinspun stressed that nurses

will need to continue to collaborate with all three parties, and must remain firm on key issues. "This is vitally important because it will help the association steer health care in a positive direction," Grinspun said, adding RNAO could never have gained the power and political influence it holds today without the determination of its members.

"We are not shrinking violets, and the system needs us more than ever," Grinspun said. "There's no greater opportunity than a minority government to work together," echoed McNeil. **RN**

MELISSA DI COSTANZO IS STAFF WRITER FOR RNAO.

# RNAO RECOGNITION AWARDS

Susan Yates, president of RNAO's **Wellington chapter**, admits that at the beginning of last year, the local executive decided it would scale back on its responsibilities. "There were things going on in everyone's lives," she explains, adding that hectic work schedules and family commitments contributed to the decision. As the group soon learned, it's hard to slow this chapter down. "You know what? We couldn't (slow down)," she laughs. "When the opportunities presented...we just had to follow through."

Last year was one of Wellington's busiest years yet, and the efforts of its members did not go unnoticed. The group picked up RNAO's *Chapter of the Year* award, which goes to the chapter that shows dedication to the association by involving its members in RNAO initiatives.

Wellington chapter members "...are ready and willing to represent the association: they have been interviewed by reporters on a number of topics, including environmental issues and home care, and have spoken at community events about poverty and end-of-life care," RNAO President David McNeil says. He went on to acknowledge the group's work on poverty. "This group has mentored and inspired members."

Yates says the "exciting" win highlights the group's efforts, but that the real reward is seeing the impact the chapter is having within the community. Membership numbers are increasing, which means there are more voices speaking out for nursing, and speaking out for health. "At the end of the day, that is really what keeps driving us forward," Yates says.

**The Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario** (NPAO) was recognized with RNAO's *Interest Group of the Year* award, given to a group that demonstrates teamwork and leadership, influences decision-makers and involves members in RNAO activities. "We are humbled by this award, and look forward to continuing to work to ensure accessible health care for all Ontarians," Claudia Mariano, president of the group, says. "NPAO

has been fortunate for...the visionary leadership of those NPs who have committed their time and energy to move our association forward." Legislative change that RNAO and NPAO advocated for last year, now means NPs can practise to their full-scope, and can admit, treat, transfer and discharge hospital in-patients. The group also feted the opening of more NP-led clinics.

NPAO's leadership team is "...committed to working together with RNAO to influence important policy decisions," McNeil said before presenting the award. "Its board members are involved in a number of working groups, cultivating key relationships with government officials...as well as multiple provincial and national health-care associations to advance nursing roles and improve patient care."

Hamilton RN **Leanne Siracusa** also received recognition in the form of a *Leadership Award in Political Action*. "It is a very slow process when you're working on influencing change in the political system," she acknowledged. "It's nice to be recognized, even for the small steps that I'm taking." The link between poverty and health motivates this RN, who says years of working in the community and seeing people struggling with poverty pushed her to become involved. On many occasions, Siracusa partnered with RNAO's Senior Policy Analyst Lynn Anne Mulrooney, who was instrumental in moving many initiatives forward.

"Whether she is writing an editorial for publication in the *Hamilton Spectator* about poverty and housing strategies, or participating in community forums, Leanne is constantly engaged in political action initiatives that improve the health of communities and have a positive effect on nursing," says McNeil.

Siracusa says the recognition will only continue to motivate her: "There are so many great things nurses are doing. To be singled out when I know there are lots of other great things going on... it's humbling." **RN**



**(Top)** Representatives of RNAO's Wellington chapter, 2011 *Chapter of the Year*, describe last year as "one of its busiest years yet." **(Centre)** Leanne Siracusa accepts her *Leadership Award in Political Action* with thanks to RNAO Policy Analyst Lynn Anne Mulrooney (right). And **(bottom, L to R)** Claudia Mariano, Michelle Acorn and Daria Parsons accept the *Interest Group of the Year* award on behalf of the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario.

To view photos from RNAO's 13th Annual Day at Queen's Park, head to [www.RNAO.org/facebook](http://www.RNAO.org/facebook).