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OPEN LETTER

September 28, 2012

Deb Matthews
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
10th floor, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor Street,
Toronto, ON M7A 2C4

Dear Hon. Deb Matthews,

We are writing to urge you to stop the sale of the Shouldice Hospital to for-profit chain corporation Centric Health. There are a range of other options open to you that would result in the Shouldice operations becoming public/non-profit as are the other modern-day hospitals in Ontario. Minister, we urge you in the strongest terms, you cannot facilitate the expansion of this major for-profit investor-driven hospital chain into Ontario under your watch.

As you know, the Private Hospitals Act allowed the existence of the Shouldice Hospital and a few other for-profit hospitals that have been "grand-parented" from before the creation of our public/non-profit hospital system. But the Act clearly stops creation of any more for-profit hospitals. Its intent was to protect Ontarians against a U.S.-style for-profit hospital system and facilitate the growth of our public non-profit hospital system.

The Act gives you the power to revoke licenses for the private hospitals under certain conditions and to refuse transfers of licenses for these hospitals. There is no question that you are able to use these powers to stop the sale of the Shouldice Hospital to Centric and protect the public interest.

Recently, the Ontario Health Coalition did a major research project in which we called all the privately-owned hospitals and clinics we could find across Canada. We asked whether they would charge us for procedures that are supposed to be covered under the Canada Health Act. We asked whether we could pay to jump the queue. We found that the majority of these for-profit corporations charged every source they could in order to maximize their profits – including charging illegal user-fees and extra-billing patients. We found that they sell queue-jumping for the wealthy. The evidence is clear that the for-profit hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres undermine public health care in Canada, siphon scarce health professionals from our local hospitals and cream-skim patients who cost less, but charge them more. This is a model of health care delivery that serves private gain but works against the public interest.

Centric Health is a very different company than that which governs the current operations of Shouldice. Centric Health is a for-profit health care giant, linked with Global Healthcare Investments and Solutions – a massive multinational investment conglomerate. This is exactly what the framers of Public Medicare in Canada wanted to guard Canadians against.

Minister, in recognition of core public morals and values, your government has run every one of its last three election campaigns stating that you will uphold *public* health care in Ontario. Ontarians do not agree with the idea of making profits off of the frail, ill and elderly. Moreover, under NAFTA, the expansion of multinational corporations that operate in the U.S. into hospital ownership in Ontario could threaten the future of our entire public health system.

When George Smitherman was Minister of Health, he took a strong unequivocal stand against the for-profit CT scanners on trucks that tried to move in from the U.S. When the for-profit Copeman Clinics -- that sold executive health care packages and co-mingled services so as to charge user fees to patients -- tried to move into Ontario, he stopped them at our urging. We are asking you again, now, to uphold your government's promise to protect public health care for people not for profit-seekers. We look forward to hearing from you on this issue.

Regards,

(hard copy signed)

Ross Sutherland
Chairperson
Ontario Health Coalition

Mike McBane
National Coordinator
Canadian Health Coalition

Maude Barlow
National Chairperson
Council of Canadians