

# Orangeville Citizen

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The humblest Citizen of all the land, when clad in armour of a righteous cause,  
is stronger than all the hosts of Error. - WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN

## The eHealth scandal: it's Canadian history revisited

ONE OF THE MOST important observations we've encountered concerning the current scandal afflicting eHealth Ontario came in a commentary by Dr. Michael Rachlis, a health policy analyst and an associate professor at the University of Toronto.

Published by the Toronto Star on June 12, the commentary should serve as a wake-up call to anyone who favours returning to the tried and true Canadian tradition of having an independent inquiry that will incidentally derail the project that's at the centre of the scandal.

The good doctor's observation is that the current controversy must be seen in the context of what's at stake in the project's objective: the long-awaited and overdue computerization of health records.

"With the headlines screaming scandal at eHealth Ontario and the media and opposition sensing blood, Ontario risks falling further behind on electronic health records," he wrote, adding:

"Of course, I understand how people who are losing jobs and savings can be angry at the symbolism of consultants who make more than \$300 an hour billing for muffins. And there has been a lot of money spent on electronic health records in the past without much to show for the expenditures."

Noting that consultants usually have legal contracts that include payment for food while they're on the road, he reminded readers that those in charge, including eHealth chair Dr. Alan Hudson, and deposed CEO Sarah Kramer and her team "were incredibly effective in their previous work at Cancer Care Ontario and the provincial wait times initiative. And they had already accomplished a lot in their first six months at eHealth, including launching a pilot project to track prescriptions for 80,000 patients in Sault Ste. Marie

and Collingwood. Finally, top-notch private sector IT people make a lot more than Kramer ever did."

His main point: You need high-quality, integrated electronic records to run a safe, efficient health care system.

He went on to illustrate how far we are behind: "On a 1981 visit to a Havana community health centre I was struck that each doctor had a binder with lists of patients with different chronic diseases.

"In what might have been an apocryphal story, a physician told me that in his guerrilla days, Fidel Castro saw a child die from asthma. Fellow guerrilla and physician Che Guevara informed Castro that the death could have been prevented with appropriate care prior to the attack.

"With a voice swelling with pride, the doctor said that Castro had created a world-class health-care system. And El Comandante insisted on the regular follow-up of all patients with asthma and other chronic diseases to prevent unnecessary deaths, such as the little boy's he had witnessed."

Dr. Rachlis said that when he returned to his practice, "I bought a binder and started keeping track of all my patients who needed routine follow-up. I discovered that I had more than twice as many patients with these conditions as I had suspected. My patients got better care. Probably some of them avoided heart attacks, strokes and kidney failure."

The next year, he visited Seattle's Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound, established in 1948 and still run as a co-operative, which by 1982 had a fully integrated electronic health record with terminals in every office hooked up to an IBM mainframe computer. "The possibilities astounded me."

According to the just-released

Ontario Health Quality Council's annual report, only 25 per cent of Ontario family doctors have electronic records, compared with 50 per cent in Alberta and 98 per cent in the Netherlands.

Even worse, it showed just 8 per cent of Ontario family doctors use their electronic records to follow up patients. "Thousands of patients with diabetes and other chronic conditions are dying unnecessarily," Dr. Rachlis wrote. "Thousands of X-rays are being redone every year because the one done a few days earlier isn't available. Castro would not be impressed."

Clearly, what we have is just another in a long list of crucial Canadian projects that became tainted — and often delayed — because of scandals over inflated costs or too much work going to friends of the government.

It started soon after Confederation, with the Canadian Pacific scandal that cost our first prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald, an election, continued with the pipeline scandal and C.D. Howe's "What's a million?" comment that brought John Diefenbaker's Conservatives to power, and more recently the sponsorship scandal that produced our current Conservative government.

The common theme in all the scandals is the importance of the projects — completion of our first transcontinental railway, bringing natural gas from Western Canada to our industrial heartland, and promoting federalism on the eve of a referendum that almost saw Quebec leave Confederation.

This time, let's hope that we get a commitment from Premier Dalton McGuinty, and support from the two opposition parties, that nothing will be done to further delay the essential computerization of all health records in such a way that they can be shared by all caregivers.



## Fighting quarry will be expensive

IF ANYTHING, TED OLDFIELD'S prediction that the North Dufferin Agricultural and Community Taskforce (NDACT) will have to raise a quarter-million dollars if it wants to fight plans for a major limestone quarry is unduly conservative.

Without a doubt, the stakes in such a battle will be high and there's no assurance that a campaign against the plans of The Highland Companies would be successful.

Clearly, the days when quarries in Dufferin and Caledon were an acceptable landscape feature are long gone.

Despite the fact Orangeville once had a quarry operation big enough to justify a rail line to the site north of Mono's 5 Sideroad and Shelburne's was the source of the splendid exterior of the former post office on Owen Sound Street, quarries today are seen as an unmixed curse.

In the circumstances, perhaps the best course for NDACT will be to strive for a compromise under which Highland will be barred from having an operation that occupies more than 100 of its 6,000 acres and is encouraged to move the aggregates by rail, not trucks on County 124.

## CITIZEN MAILBOX

### Translating cuts into impact on patients

Re: Nursing cuts at Headwaters Health Care Centre  
The news of nursing cuts to Headwaters Health Care Centre's complex continuing care unit has been couched in reassuring but misleading terms by the CEO, and as President of the Ontario Nurses' Association, I wish to translate

It was reassuring to read a more balanced article this week about NDACT proving that Highlands had violated the county tree bylaw. I found last week's article to be unbalanced and slightly unfair. Specifically, the tree bylaw situation was presented as if it was a personal issue between Karen Wallace, a private citizen, and Highland's spokesperson Michael Daniher.

From where I'm standing, Ms. Wallace appears to be doing a tremendous service to the residents of Melancton, and Mulmur for that matter. She is taking a strong stand which many are afraid to do. As a Melancton resident myself, I am most thankful that Ms. Wallace lives in my community. The work she is doing is a job that our elected officials should be doing but are not. Thank you Karen!  
Margaret Mercer  
Melancton

### 'Several errors' said in editorial

In your editorial "Needed: a good dose of common sense" (18 June), you referred to the dispute between NDACT and the Highland Group of companies, and to the bylaw that you named the "forest conservation bylaw." You made several errors.

First, the bylaw is named the "Tree-Cutting Bylaw," not the "forest conservation bylaw." The bylaw does not "conserve forest" in any case except one: when the forest owner wishes to sell some of his trees for lumber production. Housing developments, hydro line construction, firewood cutting, gravel pits, road construction — even Christmas tree harvests — are allowed without county permission. Only timber sales are forbidden without county approval.

Secondly, you equated tree harvests — the sole activity that requires "Tree-Cutting Bylaw" approval — with land clearing for farm purposes. They are not the same.

Finally, you recommended that "Failure to comply with

nursing cuts into the impact on our patients.

Headwaters Health Care Centre announced on June 18, 2009 that it is cutting three full-time and three part-time registered nurses and three full-time and three part-time registered practical nurses from its complex continuing care unit at the Shelburne site.

The CEO also announced that four full-time and four part-time unregulated personal support workers would be hired — is an increase in two hours of staff time per 24-hour period — and a replacement of nurses by unregistered, unlicensed staff.

Personal support workers are not held accountable as licensed nursing staff are. The patients at the Shelburne site range from fragile elderly with multiple medical issues who are waiting for long-term care placement, rehabilitation to assist their return to their optimum level of independence prior to hospitalization. The licensed staff gives competent, compassionate care to the dying and their families.

This group of patients needs staff skilled in physical assessments, medication side effects and interactions, pain management, accessing subcutaneous ports, intravenous therapy, accessing and maintaining central venous access devices, pain

pumps, respiratory therapies, enteral tube feeds, tracheostomy care and suctioning, complex wound and ostomy care and more.

Once these tasks are completed the staff is responsible for thorough, accurate legal documentation in a timely manner. The registered nurses who will remain at this unit know that the cuts mean their workloads will increase and the risks of patients' medical issues falling through the cracks will increase.

Studies have found that for every patient added to an average RN's workload, complication and death rates increase by 7 per cent for the patient.

We raise the standards and increase the scope of practice for RN's and RPN's then lower the requirement to be hired to provide nursing care in a professional manner.

Registered nurses are bound by regulations to advocate for their patients. Headwaters Health Care Centre nurses know that the cuts mean a decline in quality patient care that they both want to provide and are educated to provide.

When the CEO tells the community that personal support workers, not registered nurses, should perform some duties such as helping patients to the bathroom, he is — or should be — fully aware that nurses who help patients to the bathroom are also assessing one more aspect of the patient's physical state. Nurses are assessing the patients' mobility and range of motion, risk of infections, breakdowns in the skin and more.

Assessment is a large part of the role of nurses. So is supporting patients psychologically, in addition to physically.

The nursing cuts mean tens of thousands fewer hours of nursing care for our patients each year. Decreasing the ability of nurses to provide safe, high-quality patient care should not be the sacrifice required to balance a budget. Our patients and community deserve better than this, and they deserve to know the true impact of these cuts.

Linda Haslam-Stroud, RN  
President, Ontario Nurses' Association  
Toronto, ON

### New regulations are puzzling

During the afternoon of June 18th, 2009 a vehicle with a flashing light on its roof and containing three men rooled into my driveway; the men were employees of Canada Post and they preceded to tell me that I had fifteen days in which to move my mail box to a prescribed location marked about sixty yards to the east of its present location.

The reason given was that the Canada Post Corporation was concerned for the safety of its mail delivery people and considered the present location of my mailbox a potential hazard.

That mailbox has been in that location for more than fifty years, except for one occasion in 1982 when another employee of the postal service measured the height of my mailbox from the ground and found it to be 41 inches rather than the required 42 inches and four inches too far from the roadway. The height discrepancy was probably due to subsidence after many years in the ground. To accommodate the Corporation I dutifully removed the post, bored another hole and carefully replaced the mailbox to the height and location demanded.

Furthermore, traffic on this side road has not increased appreciably for the past 50 years because there has been no new construction along its alignment. Most of the existing properties are either farms or estate properties. My mail box is at the foot of my driveway and about a fifty yard walk from my house. The new location demanded by Canada Post will place the mailbox about another sixty yards to the east

• Please turn to page A12

## All the good reasons . . .

June is my favourite month. It is that beautiful transition from winter to spring into summer. Everything is in full blossom. The first cut of hay is ready to store. The first big flurry of colour explodes in the gardens.

The rains and cool temperatures of May begin to give way to the sunny days and warmer temperatures of June.

And the end of the month brings me my birthday, which is a good reason for liking any month.

The end of June flipping into the first of July, of course, also brings us all Canada's birthday. This might be a good time to ruminate on what is Canadian. Like many others, I was amused if not altogether reassured by "Joe's" assertions about what it is to be Canadian. I don't know that I would emphasize the definition of a toque — to be or not to be a hat. I have in recent years developed an allergy to beer — does that make me a little less Canadian? Probably not.

Over the years as a traveller throughout Europe, into Asia and across Africa, I learned a big value of being Canadian in the respect that people elsewhere feel for us: for our concern, as a nation, for those less fortunate than we. They respected our philanthropy and our diplomacy, worldwide.

While I was travelling, I promoted the myth that all Canadians speak both French and English. When in a French-speaking country, if anyone commented that my French was rather fluent, I would dismiss the compliment by telling them — bold-faced! — that "touts les Canadiens parlent les deux langues: Français et Anglais!" : all Canadians speak both languages: French and English! Nonsense, of course, but what fun. Some, in naive astonishment, believed me. Most did not, but were polite about the mischief.

Notwithstanding our level of bilingualism, we are considered a country of great worth. Our tolerance of difference is respected. Our diplomatic outreach was revered. The reputed freedom and level-headedness of our society was legendary. We were not invaders; we sent out doctors without borders. We were not judgmental — our journalists were famed for their balanced reports.

As we achieve our 142nd birthday, we have much to reflect upon. Without seeming to, we have achieved a great deal. We have arrived at autonomy without a gunshot. We repressed a would-be American invasion with barely a broken window (1812). We went to war as an absolute necessity when our oldest loyalties were called upon and, subsequently, avoided entering into unwarranted wars.

Internationally, we have continually harvested the balance between hostile factions, winning us the respect of all parties, with one of the few prime ministers anywhere to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (Lester B. Pearson). At all times on the international platform, we have been credited with leadership in all aspects of diplomacy and technical advancement.

Here at home, albeit that there are some monetary shortages tied to the current international crises, we are still the land that comes the closest to "milk and

honey".

In my opinion, our current leaders are making a slew of mistakes in the way they are handling the financial problems by doling out money where they should not and inflicting hardship on the undeserving. All this will tally up at some point in the not too distant future.

Meanwhile, let us not diminish what is at hand. In ways a large majority of the world cannot begin to imagine the comforts of our lives.

As I sit in the parking lot of any mall, or drive through the streets of our town, I watch the numbers of large automobiles and trucks pass by, I observe the well-dressed, well-fed folk that patronise the stores and I think: count your blessings.

However hard things are for us, they are many times harder for others around the world and, not recently, but for years. The deprivations of our fellow humans in many other parts of the world are a poor reflection of the opulence in which we live.

Yet, with our own wealth daily lessened, we are still nowhere near their scarcities. We are still queuing up at the grocery and liquor stores; we still fill our baskets at Walmart; we are still driving vehicles that consume 99 times the fuel that they should.

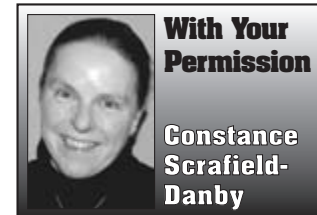
Our society bears a mountain of technology to accommodate the most basic of communications. We are inundated with so-called entertainment of the most expensive and least quality of our history.

Ah, Canada. The very name is like a beacon of what can be right about the world. We are not old-fashioned about acceptability — we are broad-based and open minded. Our country has the vision of youth and the strength of wisdom. There is a perception of big skies and open hands that makes living in Canada so enviable — so desirable.

It is really important that we continue to strike the right balance over the next ten years or so. We must rein in our leadership not to be carried away by fear and paranoia, which are really only excuses for control of society. As the rest of the world rushes toward a vindication of T. H. Wells' predictions — albeit early — in his novel, 1984 — we must keep our cool heads. We must encourage our youth to care about the future of this wonderful country and its incredibly flexible society. They have much to do to repair the mistakes of the last century and they need to understand that.

Canada has — inadvertently or otherwise — evolved a society that is amazingly well balanced. There will be conflicts and dissension no matter how good things are but we must strive to maintain our equilibrium.

Most of all, we must do all we can to encourage the young people of this land to understand the importance of this country's international role in the future.



With Your Permission

Constance Scrafield-Danby