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March 12, 2002

The Honourable Tony Clement
Minister of Health and Long Term Care
March 12th, 2002

Dear Mr. Clement,

I was saddened to learn of the decision by the executive of Saint Michael's Hospital in Toronto to close their Psychology Department. As you know, "St. Mike's" is in a poor residential area of Toronto and the typical individuals who are seen by psychologists at the hospital are unable to pay the fees that private practitioners need to charge to cover their overhead. Having staff psychologists as integral parts of hospitals makes good financial sense because the office space exists within the hospitals and psychologists salaries are modest compared to what the government pays physicians with similar years of training. Psychologists are the primary experts in bringing about behavioural changes in areas associated with health. Since lifestyle and behavioural compliance are paramount in providing for positive health outcomes in many conditions and consequently reduce health expenditures, the long-term costs to the Ministry of Health will increase if this and similar moves are made in the future.

On a personal level, I work in the forensic area and have developed a tool that is currently in use in remote areas of the Province to screen individuals for Fitness to Stand Trial. The twin motivations for development of this instrument were improvement in patient care and efficiency resulting in savings to the Ministries involved. Consequently, I am well aware of the need for financial responsibility on the part of governments. To do this effectively, one must consider all of the information available. Taking the long-term perspective, one cannot help but be struck by the congruence between ethical considerations and financial responsibility. Unfortunately, closures of hospital based Psychology Departments in the Province of Ontario satisfies neither objective.

Sincerely,

David Nussbaum, Ph. D., C. Psych.