



Ontario's Psychologists Warn of Impacts of Wholesale Termination of Psychology Staff at St. Michael's Hospital, Toronto

(Toronto, March 6, 2002): The Ontario Psychological Association reacted with dismay to news that St. Michael's Hospital in Toronto intends to terminate the employment of every clinical psychologist and psychology intern on staff. The terminations will take effect on March 22nd and affect eight psychology staff plus two doctoral interns.

"This will have an immediate and unfortunate impact on the community that St. Michael's serves", said Dr. Ester Cole, President of the Ontario Psychological Association and a practising psychologist. "Last year the psychologists at St. Michael's treated a total of 550 patients. The community served by St. Michael's has a number of particularly vulnerable populations. Since psychological services provided outside of hospitals are not covered by OHIP, most of these people will have nowhere to go for necessary and ongoing psychology services."

Dr. Ian Nicholson, President of the Hospital Psychological Association of Ontario said: "We are saddened that what is happening at St. Michael's is, unfortunately, happening elsewhere in Ontario. In order to reduce costs, over the last five to seven years there has been a substantial reduction in the amount of psychology services available through public hospitals. This is "privatization by stealth", because it forces patients from the publicly-funded to the privately funded sector."

The terminations at St. Michael's Hospital will have a direct and immediate impact on the Head Injury Clinic, the Breast Clinic, cardiology, obstetrics-gynecology, nephrology, the Cystic Fibrosis Clinic and the outpatient assessment clinic of the suicide prevention service.

"The impact of poor mental health on an individual's physical well-being has been documented extensively," added Barbara Everett, Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division. "To neglect the mental health consequences of serious physical illness is remarkably short-sighted and more costly in the long run."

"It has been brought to our attention that St. Michael's may provide psychology services by contracting out", said Dr. Cole. "We're doubtful. First, to date nothing has been said to psychology staff about contracting out. Second, patient care would still be interrupted. Third, experience across Canada and elsewhere indicates that contracting out will not work well for the population St. Michael's serves."

"It is of particular concern to us that this decision was made so abruptly, with no consultation with or advance notice to the community, the organizations, groups or individuals who will be directly affected," said Ruth daCosta, Executive Director of Covenant House on Gerrard Street. "Patients will be needlessly traumatised by the interruption in care. We are already feeling the impact on our ability to obtain crisis intervention for homeless and runaway youth".

"Another impact of the terminations at St. Michael's will be the loss of the internship program for psychologists completing their final doctoral year", said Dr. Ruth Berman, Executive Director of the Ontario Psychological Association. "St. Michael's was one of the few teaching hospitals left in the Greater Toronto Area where students could complete their internships. It is ironic indeed, that doctoral candidates who have been educated in Ontario increasingly have to seek internship appointments out-of-province or out-of-country and, chances are, they won't return to Ontario after their internships are completed".

There are over 2,000 psychologists currently registered to practise in Ontario. The Ontario Psychological Association is the voluntary, professional association for psychologists in Ontario.

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Backgrounder Attached.