

A Misuse of Public Funds

Jim McCarter, the Ontario Auditor General recently released the **Special Report on Consultant Use in Selected Health Organizations**. These sample organizations included 3 Local Health Integration Networks ((LHINs) and 16 hospitals, one of which was our **Sault Area Hospital**.

Significant deficiencies in controls over consulting services were documented at both the LHINs and the hospitals. This resulted in hundreds of thousands of dollars in exorbitant costs in the use of consultants. In the light of health care cuts and budget constraints at virtually all Ontario hospitals it is alarming to learn that money has been misspent in the overuse and misuse of consultants and at a high cost to the public. This is money that could have been spent on much needed health care.

Perhaps this situation could have been avoided if hospital financial data and planning documents had been available to the public who have built, paid for and need our local hospitals. Surely the public should have a say in where our health care money is going. Public accountability would ensure that public money is spent for the public's benefit and spent efficiently and economically.

The Auditor General's audit includes an analysis and summary of the use of consultants by the LHINs and hospitals. In order to curtail future serious misuse of public funds the Ontario Auditor General has made recommendations pertaining to all LHINs and hospitals in Ontario to the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. The Ontario Health Minister, Deb Matthews, has admitted that the government has not been as accountable as it ought to have been and has apologized to taxpayers. The ministry itself has been guilty of hiring consultants without competitive bidding and without properly monitoring consultant's fees.

We have been told that this will all change...

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