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Medicine. Politics. Common Sense.

Smokey Should Put Out Fires, Not Start Them

I've had the pleasure of being a doctor for 28 years now. I've long since appreciated that in order to provide the best care to patients, members of a health care team (doctors, nurses, pharmacists, allied health care providers and yes, even clerical support staff) must trust each other, and must work collegially and co-operatively. Without that collegiality, the team fractures and the patients suffer.

This is why many physician leaders over the past few years have [advocated for more funding for Nurses, PSWs](#) and other [front line health care workers](#). I've seen first hand how [nurses](#) and PSWs go above and beyond for patients. My patients need positive, happy, engaged allied health care providers to serve their needs.

Unfortunately the recent actions of OPSEU president Warren "Smokey" Thomas and Unifor President Jerry Dias (both old school union types) show a total disregard for health care teams and patients. They have reacted to [some sort of labour dispute](#) amongst the staff of the Owen Sound Family Health Organization (or FHO) and the owners (essentially about twenty family doctors), by using old school divisive union tactics that may have a place in private business – but will hurt the patients of Ontario.

First, a full disclosure. While I happen to be President Elect of the Ontario Medical Association (OMA), I actually don't know any of the doctors in the FHO in Owen Sound. I'm also not familiar with the situation there, other than [what I read in the media](#) and [press releases](#).

But I do know that doctors have been warning that cutting patient services, like the Liberal Government did unilaterally, would cut staff and [even close clinics](#). Cutting physician funding is a cut to physician clinics, patients services and the staff who work there.

This is why it is so irresponsible Smokey and Dias to [publicly shame physicians](#) who own the clinics on social media. I will not include a copy of OPSEU's Facebook ad, but it basically implores people to "Tell the doctors....to get back to the table with a decent offer. They can afford it." Then a list of all the doctors in the FHO is provided. Smokey and Dias are now calling on patients to make an appointment with their doctors, to advance a political agenda. At a time of wait lists and family doctor shortages, that is an appointment that could have, *and should have*, gone to a sick patient

Targeting employers is an old union tactic. There are always ads from Unions advocating for membership on radio, TV and the internet. But doctors are not big for-profit business. They're not big box stores. They're not giant corporations. They do this work because medicine is a calling. That's why so many are offended by these ads.

Smokey and Dias also think suggesting doctors don't know what they're doing is a good idea. They've spearheaded the ["Without us, your doctor is just guessing"](#) campaign which suggests that physicians can't diagnose a disease based on, you know, talking to and examining a patient. Can you just imagine what would happen if the Ontario Medical Association were to launch a campaign that said "Without Doctor's Orders, Nurses Would Have No Direction?". (NB – The OMA won't do that, we have too much respect for the nurses).

Suggesting that physicians work in ["for profit clinics"](#) that are analogous to private [care](#) (when everything is publicly funded) is another ridiculous statement. Again,

this is basically an old union tactic. Go after “the rich” and “greedy capitalists.” Use the politics of division to frame your members as the “have-nots”, the “poor” and the “oppressed” to garner public sympathy. Embarrass the corporations into giving you what you want. It may work in the real private sector, but these kinds of derogatory comments are only going to harm health care, and their own members.

Firstly, all health care workers, including physicians, are paid by the government of Ontario via your tax dollars. Obviously some workers (even some physicians) are salaried, some get a portion of physicians billings and some are on a bit of a hybrid model, but the money all comes from the same spot.

Secondly, Not sure how what Smokey’s long term strategy is, but it seems to me that attacking allies that have advocated for more funding for front line health care workers (OPSEU MEMBERS!) isn’t a great idea. Maybe Smokey is taking a page out of the [Donald Trump school of leadership](#).

Thirdly, I don’t think Smokey and Dias have considered the damage that will be done to patient care. Care teams for patients (particularly in family physicians offices) are smaller, more intimate and absolutely must work well together for patients to receive optimum care. By using such divisive tactics in a small office they are sowing dissent and mistrust. It’s really hard to see how trust will be rebuilt in the future.

Health care in Ontario has been in a crisis for many years now. For the sake of the patients, physicians and allied health care workers need to work cordially and cooperatively to promote optimum health care planning for Ontario. Smokey and Dias have started a bit of dumpster fire with their actions. It’s a pity they don’t realize that.