



July 18, 2018

It had been the position of the physicians at the OSFHO to not publicly discuss the status of ongoing collective bargaining negotiations. We believed that fairness and respect held us to a higher standard, which we honoured. We recognized that, though negotiations may at times be contentious, resolution is best achieved by working together. However, recent events, including the escalations at the picket line and serious misrepresentations of our commitment to patient care, require us to share our position with the community.

The physicians of the OSFHO are committed to the patients in our care. Patients will always be our first priority. That is why we legally brought in support during the strike. We wanted to ensure that patients continued to have access to care for as long as the union elected to strike. The workers that have committed themselves to the delivery of patient care during the strike have been subjected to harassment in person, online and in other forms but they continue to act in the best interests of patients. Over the past eight weeks, our service has been affected only slightly by the labour dispute. The disruptions have been primarily caused by the escalation in tactics by OPSEU Local 276.

This strike has continued because we have an obligation to ensure that physician led care in our community is sustainable in the long term. Earlier this year, with the consent of both sides, a Ministry of Labour Conciliator was appointed. Through our shared efforts, a tentative agreement was reached that would have seen an increase in wages and benefits comparable with other settlements in the sector. Acceptance of this agreement was recommended to the employees and to the physicians by their respective collective bargaining committees. The physicians accepted this settlement. OPSEU Local 276 did not. Had this tentative agreement been approved, a new collective agreement would have become effective. Instead, the employees represented by OPSEU Local 276 elected to commence a strike and the physicians were forced to operate in a different environment. The physicians have begun to develop processes that will lead to better and more efficient patient care.

On July 17, we met with OPSEU Local 276 and discussed how the delivery of patient care will change going forward. We advised that, through the disruption, we determined that the previous processes were inefficient. Certain tasks have become redundant and no longer required to be performed. Other tasks are more appropriately performed by classifications with more suited skill sets. This will result in the hiring of new employees and the displacement of others. This was not an easy message to deliver to people who have been a part of the organization for some time, but it is a decision made in the interest of patients and it is required in the circumstances. An agreement with the OPSEU Local 276 appeared attainable but final details could not be resolved and discussions ended late yesterday. Negotiations are expected to continue. As we have been doing, we will monitor activities on the picket line and keep the interests of patients at the forefront of all of our efforts. In the case access to care is disrupted, we will take all reasonable means to restore it.

For our over 30,000 rostered patients, they can continue to book appointments and seek care at our facility. You are, and will remain, our priority. We thank our colleagues at the OMA for your moral support and offer of legal support.

The 22 physicians of the Owen Sound Family Health Organization