

## Did anyone really think this was over?

by SHERALYN ROMAN

I can't help but wonder with all the 'breaking' news this week, whether or not officially 'giving up' has become an actual strategic initiative?

It seems to me that the Chief Medical Officer for the Province has given up on us and/or given up on arguing with the Premier over an effective COVID prevention strategy; that the Minister of Education has given up on schools and teachers, that our Premier has given up on nurses, hospitals and children and that 'learning to live' with COVID is the only clear and discernible messaging coming from anyone. My interpretation of all this is that we've given up altogether and might as well be waving a white flag from the top of Queen's Park.

How else to describe the latest round of actions and announcements (and I use both of those terms loosely) from our Provincial government? Delaying the start of school was a decision based largely on public outcry, and a good one, but I'm wondering why the rush to return is now on given that our numbers are still so astronomical?

Certainly all the talk we've heard so far is not nearly enough to improve the situation in schools - just ask any parent, teacher or administrator. Let's recap: we will no longer be advising cohorts of a positive COVID test in the classroom; we are no longer requiring the isolation of siblings, we are no longer testing or will only provide access to testing if symptoms develop while at school (hard to prove) and the promised numbers of HEPA filters still doesn't adequately address the needs of the actual number of classrooms.

Teachers will finally be provided with non-fit tested N95s (something both they, and nurses, should have had from the very beginning) and that's about the only positive thing I can say about the back to school 'plan.' With Omicron so widespread and moving quickly, the other proposed strategy for dealing with anticipated teacher absence is to permit retired teachers to work more days than previously allowed. Because putting older adults (already determined to be at higher risk for contracting serious illness) and young unvaccinated or only partially vaccinated children together in a classroom is a good idea.

Finally, again, as any parent or teacher can tell you, when teacher absences aren't covered by supply staff (because there are none) what happens to your children? They are dispersed into other, already crowded classrooms, to be managed for the day. In other words, the 'giving up' strategy looks like this: we're sending the kids back to school without second vaccinations, to face teacher shortages, not testing anyone for COVID and potentially cramming students into classrooms they would not normally be a part of. I think I like the odds of rolling the dice in Vegas better.

If this doesn't scream 'giving up' because we have no idea what else to do, I don't know what does.

In other non-news, hospitals are being overwhelmed yet again by a surge of patients that has quite simply become unmanageable. We're being told we will no longer have access to reporting on the actual numbers of COVID-positive people. Nurses, already reeling from more than two years of unrelenting pandemic care are being asked regularly to work 16-hour shifts when hospitals are short-staffed. Hospitals right now, by the way, are ALWAYS short staffed. Several universities that provide nursing programs have sent emails to their students asking and/or directing them to be ready to go to work in the hospitals to help relieve an already overburdened system.

This has been deemed a credible strategy even though in some cases, the only clinical exposure these students have had is one day a week, under direct supervision, providing basic care. Apparently, this is also a more credible strategy than fast-tracking already fully qualified nurses who received their designations from other countries, have completed the required Canadian certifications and are now simply waiting for a piece of paper from the government to clear them for work. (Although - at time of writing, this policy has just now been changed! Well - there's some good news at least. Welcome to all nurses who will now officially be recognized as

nurses! Related ? prepare for a PSW shortage.)

There's a part of me that doesn't really blame the government for all of this. Perhaps that's because I feel a bit like giving up myself. I don't know whom to believe anymore and trying to separate fact from fiction is akin to finding the proverbial needle in a haystack.

Is Omicron really milder when at least two children died from it last week and our ICU's and PICU's are at their highest levels since this whole pandemic started?

Does our provincial top doctor really believe that testing is a ?luxury?? Does Doug Ford really believe getting into his truck and helping drive people to hospital is all a paramedic does? A shiny new jacket doesn't make him a paramedic and paramedics don't need his help but if WE need an ambulance, what are the chances of actually getting one?

Does Mr. Ford honestly believe people want to see pictures of him posing in front of one bed proudly declaring that adding beds to hospitals is the answer? Talk about a staged photo op! By the way, beds without nurses are meaningless. What about nursing homes? I presume we've given up on the idea of an ?iron ring? around nursing homes? I guess we can no longer afford it after giving all that money to for-profit homes last year. I feel like we've given up on our seniors. Maybe because they are old we don't care?

Finally, I'll leave you with this thought and spare you the trouble of going down the same rabbit hole I did recently: Perhaps so many of us, including even some media folk, have given up on holding the government's strategy (or lack thereof) to account because of this; there are a group of folks out there who truly believe that drinking their own urine is a cure for COVID. As if ivermectin, horse de-wormer and drinking bleach weren't bad enough, there are those amongst us who actually believe consuming our own bodily fluids are better than any vaccine.

With that kind of attitude out there ? can we really blame the government for a strategy that involves just giving up?