

Inconsistency Be Thy Name

by SHERALYN ROMAN

When you're two years into a global pandemic and don't really want to write about it anymore but troubling inconsistencies consistently arise, it's hard to ignore and even harder NOT to write about it.

It isn't just the pandemic either, but much like last week's article, it's this series of little things that noodle around in my brain making it hard to reconcile the 'narrative' with reality. As it turns out, perhaps reality is summarized best using just one word - inconsistency.

The most troubling inconsistency recently has to be any and all references to 'fixing' our long term care system. This fix comes only after close to 4,000 people died during the initial waves of COVID-19. That's 4,000 parents and grandparents, loved ones who required specialized care, human beings who were left to die; bedridden, soiled and dehydrated, many of whom didn't actually die of COVID but from the inhumane conditions they fell victim to. The fix involves some money, much of it devoted to hiring inspectors, not more PSWs who actually work in these facilities, and not for paying those same PSWs a living wage for the incredibly challenging work they do.

The fix was only promised after we also rewarded many of those same for profit long term care homes with extensions of their service contracts by up to 30 years and gave them millions of dollars for?for what exactly?

On the topic of health care, another troubling inconsistency is why we continue to allow unvaccinated health care workers and PSWs to work in hospitals and other health care settings, including entering the homes of people who require additional support so as not to burden our hospitals. The Premier asked hospital CEOs for input on whether the vaccine should be mandated for health care workers and the possible impacts of taking this action a number of weeks ago and yet still hasn't taken any action. Meanwhile, many hospitals have taken it upon themselves (much like many private and public sector employers) to make this a condition of employment but without a top down directive there's too much wiggle room for interpretation and potentially leaves employers vulnerable. This one should have been a 'no-brainer,' health care workers are essential and needed and while there is a small risk that some will leave the system if forced to choose between vaccination and employment, the larger risk is from the many who have already been vaccinated but are leaving in droves because they are overworked and understaffed. The government can't call these folks heroes but then do nothing to repeal or fix Bill #124, mandate a living wage and only watch from the sidelines but take no action against anti-vaxxers who are still protesting against these dedicated individuals who did what the government asked, got vaccinated and are simply trying to do their job.

Another sector still facing ongoing challenges due to an inconsistently applied vaccine mandate is education. According to one recent report, as many as 40% of all new COVID cases are coming from within the school system. This is, of course, a direct result of the fact that children under 12 years of age cannot be vaccinated and, in all likelihood, because of some education workers who are refusing the vaccine. The government's solution was to authorize pharmacies 'to provide publicly funded COVID-19 rapid antigen testing services' during the first two weeks of September. This 'temporary free access' was for individuals subject to an employer's policy to attest to not being fully vaccinated. It concerns me greatly that we were paying (and I can find no evidence that we are not still paying) for rapid antigen testing for folks who refuse to be vaccinated. Talk about inconsistencies. We undertake a massive, province wide vaccination program, encourage folks to 'do the right thing' for the sake of us all but if you don't, that's ok we will pay for your tests to prove you are COVID free. In the education system we are leaving the monitoring of these tests and the verification of 'proof' (apparently a picture on a cell phone will suffice) to individual principals in schools.

Still on the topic of education, providing free take home PCR tests to families (tests that were provided by the federal government, for free to the provinces) has taken more than '50 instructional days into the school year for this program to get underway across the province.' These tests were distributed to private schools months ago, so why not to our publicly funded schools, especially when there was no cost to our provincial government? When reporters asked Minister Lecce about this, his response was that the

government first wanted to ?understand the effectiveness of this model.? They ran the program as a trial in 160 schools in Ottawa and Toronto and not surprisingly (at least to me) Lecce confirmed, ?what we heard is there is a great benefit for families ? and (they) are much more convenient for working parents.? It's an overused expression, but let me get this straight - it took research to figure out that providing already available free testing kits to children in classrooms where an exposure took place was faster, more efficient, easier on the kids and helped to contain the spread of COVID in the classroom?

Finally, and just in time for this article, an announcement about an announcement was made on November 1, that seems to suggest our Premier will be raising the minimum wage for all workers across the province, effective January 1, 2022. The hike will result in a minimum wage of \$15.00 per hour and comes into effect (she said suspiciously) during an election year. I'm wondering if the Premier is counting on most people having a short memory, since this is the very same wage hike he cancelled soon after taking office four years ago. Inconsistency be thy name indeed.