

Words can mean a lot - or indeed, very little

by SHERALYN ROMAN

What can be said that hasn't already been said about the state of our healthcare system?

I suppose it depends on one's perspective. Having recently been on the receiving end of a missive from our local MPP, I'd venture to say that according to the MPP's office, the script, likely created with help from the communications spin masters at Queen's Park, says a lot. As the recipient however, I'm inclined to think what it actually says is very little indeed. Words being what they are, the English language is both beautiful and bountiful ? in the sense that one can craft a sentence so well, through judicious use of a variety of words, that undiscerning readers might believe them to suggest one thing when they mean entirely another. It's a skill the Ford government has honed to perfection (which is about the only time you'll see me writing something ?nice? about Ford and friends).

Between the email I received and a quick review of the Ontario government's own website, there is a lot of language being written about the state of our healthcare system. You might be surprised to learn that the language makes nary a mention of the 12-14 or even 24 hour wait times in emergency rooms, and only fleetingly refers to such problematic issues as paramedic offloading times. It does, however, sing the praises of the over 3,907 in-hospital patients who ?have voluntarily added more long-term care(s) homes to their list of preferred options,? thus relieving bed pressures. Voluntarily? I'm sure being told they'd be forced to foot a \$400 a day hospital bill had nothing to do with those voluntary additions. So much for free healthcare in Ontario. Never forget that many of the persons impacted by this one act alone are our seniors who paid into the system with their labour and their taxes for the past 40 years only to now be thrown onto the trash heap, disrespected and treated like so much dead weight.

Along with all the extra beds from ?volunteers,? comes yet another announcement of so many more ?new? beds. As a reminder to the Progressive Conservatives, beds mean nothing without staff and our healthcare workers?whom you once referred to as heroes ? are overworked, exhausted and stretched to the max. They're doing the best they can and kudos to them, but beds without staff are pointless and the only actual recent addition I've seen in local hospitals is the addition of ?wait time? clocks because somehow knowing how long you've been waiting makes waiting so much better.

Perhaps instead of long waits, the Ford government is banking on people using the new Health811 tool. Claiming ?we have made it more convenient to book or take a health care appointment by launching virtual care options,? (?take? it where I wonder, on a date?) we are encouraged to chat online with a registered nurse AND to use this tool ?to find services like community health centres, mental health support or a walk-in clinic close to where you live.?

The only problem with this is that I've lost track of how many times walk-in clinics have refused to take walk-ins! Literally refused, saying we need to book appointments and encouraging us instead to simply go to the hospital. Geez, I wonder why hospitals are so busy?

But wait! Maybe I don't need a walk-in or even a virtual appointment. I can just go to my local pharmacy for certain things, right? Apparently it depends on what you need. If you have Covid, for example, (yes Virginia, covid is still a thing), it seems that only Galen Weston-owned pharmacies can distribute Paxlovid for those who meet the conditions to obtain it. The conditions, you ask? Well, you need to have a current kidney function test on file. Because that's something most of us have laying around the house. What's that, you say? Call your family doctor or go to a walk-in and get a requisition for a kidney function test? Well, if you've got Covid, you shouldn't be leaving the house, your family doctor (if you have one) is booked up for two weeks solid and won't do virtual appointments, and, as for the walk-in clinics, see the previous paragraph. More accessible health care options? I don't think so. But, if you want a prescription for Ozempic to shed those pesky holiday pounds, for that you CAN simply sign up online for a paid healthcare provider who will, after you answer a few questions, prescribe all the diabetes drugs you want.

If you need prescriptions for something other than Ozempic, according to our local MPP's office, they have ?also made it more

convenient for you to renew prescriptions for certain medications without having to first make arrangements with your family doctor. Pharmacists are able to renew prescriptions for chronic medications that no longer have refills to help you avoid interrupting drug therapy. I have to ask, which ones? Because I am on two separate low dose meds and I still have to book an appointment, see my family doctor and then take a form to the pharmacist. They are not opioids, they are not even for a chronic, life-threatening condition ? more ?maintenance? type prescriptions. Apart from perhaps an annual blood test, these drugs should qualify and I could help ease the burden on my family doctor's schedule but the last time my pharmacist gave me a 30-day supply until I could get an appointment, they had their wrist slapped.

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