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June 12, 2006

VIA E-Mail and Chapter Mail

Distribution:

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Government Relations and Social Action E-Alert

- **Becoming Involved in Your LHINs**
- **Update on Drug System Reform**
- **Update on Human Rights System Reform**

Becoming Involved in Your LHINs

The Ontario Government and Community Social Action Committee (OSAC) met on June 10 for a planning session. One prominent issue was how MS-specific concerns could have higher profile within the new Local Health Integration Networks (LHIN). Essentially, LHINs are the umbrella structures which will plan, integrate and fund health services within 14 specific geographic areas in Ontario. They include hospitals, community care access centres, home care, long-term care, mental health, community health centres as well as addiction and community support services.

Several OSAC members, who are involved in their local community health services, advised that many LHINs currently are holding community consultations and open houses and conducting surveys to find out what individual consumers need. They suggested that MS Society members contact their local LHINs to find out if an open house or survey is taking place in their communities. It is also a good idea to ask to be put on the mailing list for your local LHINs.

You can find out in which of the 14 LHINs you live by going to the LHINs pages on the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care website:

http://www.health.gov.on.ca/transformation/lhin/lhin_mn.html The menu at the left-hand side of the page provides links to each of the 14 LHINs and local contact information.

Update on Drug System Reform

In mid April, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care George Smitherman introduced Bill 102, legislation that will make significant changes to the drug system in Ontario. It is anticipated that the bill will be approved by the Ontario legislature later this week, and that it will come into effect on October 1. Thanks to the efforts of the MS Society and many other

health charities and organizations, there have been a number of significant improvements to the legislation. We called for a clear definition of “interchangeability” of drugs and that therapeutic substitution be banned. Other important recommendations were the establishment of an appeal process for decisions about drug listing or delisting and the inclusion of the Citizens’ Council (a public advisory group) in the legislation. The government has agreed that all these recommendations – and a number of other improvements – will be included as amendments when the legislation is passed.

Overall, it appears the changes will benefit people with MS who rely on the government drug program for their medications. The MS Society will continue to work with officials within the Drug System Secretariat and the Ministry of Health to improve access to all MS therapies.

Human Rights Legislation

The Ontario government continues to move its legislation to amend the Ontario Human Rights Code (Bill 107). The legislation has gone through second reading and has been referred to the Justice Policy Committee for possible public hearings. The legislation, if passed, will significantly change the process people use to bring human rights complaints forward. There are concerns the changes might actually curtail access to the human rights system for people with disabilities.

Essentially, the changes are:

- The Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) will focus on education, public advocacy, research and analysis to counter discrimination
- Two new secretariats will be established within the OHRC, an anti-racism secretariat and a disability rights secretariat.
- Individuals with human rights complaints will make them directly to the Human Rights Tribunal of Ontario. (Currently complaints go first to the OHRC, which investigates and determines whether the complaints should go to the Tribunal.)
- A new Human Rights Legal Support Centre will be created.

It is unclear right now whether the Human Rights Legal Support Centre would provide enough support for individuals who bring human rights complaints forward. The MS Society is working with other organizations to ensure that our concerns are heard before the legislation is passed.

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