

Board of Directors of Drugless Therapy Naturopathy

June 26, 2008

New Minister of Health and Long-Term Care

George Smitherman, who has been Minister of Health and Long-Term Care since the McGuinty Liberals formed the government in October, 2003, has left the portfolio. In a mini-Cabinet shuffle announced on June 19, Smitherman was moved to the combined portfolio of Energy and Infrastructure. He will be replaced at Health and Long-Term Care by David Caplan. David Caplan's mother Elinor held the same post under the Peterson Government in the late 1980s. She has continued since then to be very much involved in health policy matters, so David will assume his new responsibilities with some considerable background. As well, we have been informed that Abid Malik will stay on as Senior Policy Advisor to David Caplan, at least for the time being.

Prior to the announcement of the Cabinet shuffle, there was also an announcement of some changes in Ministers' Chiefs of Staff. Of particular relevance to the healthcare sector is the move of Jamieson Steeves from his position as Chief of Staff to George Smitherman to Chief of Staff to the Premier, replacing Gerald Butts. Before joining Smitherman's office last October, Mr. Steeves was the health policy advisor to the Premier. It is noteworthy that the Premier's two closest advisers, his Chief of Staff and the Secretary to the Cabinet, both have strong backgrounds in health care. (Shelly Jamieson, the Cabinet Secretary, is a former president of Extendicare Canada Inc.).

The Board does not anticipate that the change in Ministers will have a major impact on the direction of health policy or on the initiatives in which the BDDTN and the Naturopathic profession are interested. For example, the creation of the Transitional Council for Naturopathy is likely to proceed on the same time lines, namely by late 2008 or early 2009. For its part, the Board will continue to meet with and otherwise communicate with Ministry officials on matters of mutual interest and will begin to build a relationship with the new Minister and his political staff.

Bill C-51

Bill C-51, an Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act, was introduced in the House of Commons on April 8, 2008. The bill is of concern to the BDDT-N because of its potential impact on patient access to substances recommended by Naturopathic Doctors. The Board has been closely monitoring the Bill's progress in consultation with the Canadian Association of Naturopathic Doctors (CAND) who as the national association for naturopathic doctors in Canada has the lead in representing the profession and its concerns at the Federal Level. In addition to the work being done by the CAND the Standing Committee will be tasked with reviewing and recommending changes to Bill C-51 if it passes second reading and is referred to the Committee. The Board has also indicated an intention to make a submission to the Committee.

It now appears that some of the concerns of the Board and the profession will be addressed through amendments put forward by Health Minister Tony Clement if the Bill passes second reading and is referred to the Standing Committee on Health when the House of Commons resumes sitting this fall. There is a possibility that the Prime Minister will prorogue Parliament within the next several months, meaning that Bill C-51 would die on the Order Paper and would have to be reintroduced in a subsequent sitting.

Nonetheless, the Board continues to monitor the situation and will take whatever action is required to ensure that patients continue to have access to the substances they need from the Naturopathic Doctors they consult. C-51 has also, once again, highlighted the need for NDs to be able to prescribe and dispense substances that patients require and that may not fall under the category of Natural Health Products as defined by the Natural Health Product regulations.

The authority to decide which professions may prescribe and dispense lies with the provincial government. Accordingly, and in consultation with the OAND and the CCNM, the Board intends to redouble its efforts with the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to amend the Naturopathy Act, 2007 to allow NDs to prescribe and dispense those natural health products that are integral to the practice of naturopathic medicine.

Transitional Councils

The Transitional Council for Traditional Chinese Medicine Practitioners and Acupuncturists has been appointed and will hold its inaugural meeting this week. The Board has been invited to attend the meeting and is pleased to see this Transitional Council underway at last. Our last contact with the government indicated that the appointment of the other Transitional Councils, including for Naturopathic Medicine, will occur during the last quarter of 2008 or the first quarter of 2009.