



PUBLIC STATEMENT THANKING OTTAWA’S AND DURHAM REGION’S MEDICAL OFFICERS OF HEALTH

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Seniors for Social Action Ontario seniorsactionontario@gmail.com

Dr. Vera Etches Takes Action In Ottawa

It was reported that on September 22, 2020 Dr. Vera Etches, Medical Officer of Health for Ottawa Public Health took the unprecedented step under the Health Protection and Promotion Act, of ordering the Ottawa Hospital to manage two Extendicare operated facilities in the city – West End Villa and Laurier Manor. Her action came after a large second wave of COVID-19 outbreaks occurred in these facilities according to the Ottawa Citizen.

<https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/public-health-orders-hospital-to-take-over-management-of-long-term-care-homes>

Seniors for Social Action Ontario (SSAO) today issued a Public Statement thanking Dr. Etches for stepping in to save the lives of the residents of these facilities. With members and supporters in the Ottawa area who have loved ones in these facilities, SSAO says that her action is greatly appreciated.

Dr. Etches is uniquely positioned to know when it is appropriate to order in a hospital team. She is a very experienced Medical Officer of Health having served as an Associate Medical Officer of Health, Acting Medical Officer of Health and Director of Clinical Services at the Sudbury & District Health Unit (SDHU). She has “specialty training in Public Health and Preventive Medicine” and medical degrees from the University of British Columbia and the University of Toronto. She is also an Adjunct Professor at the University of Ottawa supervising medical residents in Public Health and Preventive and Family Medicine. <https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-services/dr-vera-etches-medical-officer-of-health.aspx>

We salute Dr. Etches for doing what many others have failed to do –protect vulnerable older adults.

Nursing home residents are too often forgotten, left unprotected, and abandoned by long term care companies, public officials, and some professionals. Dr. Etches has proven that she understands and embraces her responsibilities as Medical Officer of Health for all people and did the right thing.

Dr. Etches is the second Medical Officer of Health to take this action.

Dr. Robert Kyle Takes Action in Durham Region

On April 22, 2020, in Durham Region, Dr. Robert Kyle, another Medical Officer of Health, used his authority under the Health Protection and Promotion Act to order Lakeridge Health into Extendicare Assist managed and Southbridge operated facility – Orchard Villa. It had the highest death rate in the province.

<https://www.lakeridgehealth.on.ca/en/news/index.aspx?page=2&newsId=8790a85e-7908-4a1b-a042-be3a50d7f5bf>

Dr. Kyle was the first Medical Officer of Health to take this action during the pandemic, and doing so also likely saved countless lives. His order was specific in addressing the immediate risk of COVID-19 to residents and staff of Orchard Villa. Lakeridge Health led the monitoring, investigation and response to the outbreak and his Order required Southbridge Care Homes Inc. to work with the hospital to ensure, among other things, active screening of residents, staff and visitors; active and ongoing surveillance of all residents; and active and ongoing oversight of the delivery of clinical care. Infection Prevention and Control and clinical teams from Lakeridge Health were able to bring that outbreak under control with the assistance of the Canadian military. SSAO's members in Durham Region, some of whom had loved ones in Orchard Villa, are also grateful to Dr. Kyle, Lakeridge Health and the military for their help.

We especially thank Dr. Robert Kyle, another Medical Officer of Health who is uniquely positioned to issue this kind of order. He is a faculty member at the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto and Chair of Public Health Ontario's Board of Directors. Dr. Kyle has a certificate in Community Medicine (Public Health and Preventive Medicine) from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, is a fellow of the Royal College, holds a certificate in Family Medicine from the College of Family Physicians of Canada, and is a fellow of the American College of Preventive Medicine.

<https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/about/blog/2017/robert-kyle-named-chair>

Seniors For Social Action Ontario's wish is that other Medical Officers of Health and medical and nursing professionals will follow the exemplary lead of Dr. Kyle and Dr. Etches and take action to protect older adults in long term care facilities.

Action Required By The Ontario Government

We are also, once again, calling on the Ontario government to reintroduce comprehensive yearly inspections that it largely abandoned last year, and to re-introduce a prosecution policy to charge facilities and companies that regularly flout the law.

Medical Officers of Health should not have to repeatedly issue Orders to protect residents. It is the responsibility of the Ontario government that regulates, licenses, and funds these facilities to take pro-active action to prevent outbreaks and ensure that all facilities are operating according to the Act and Regulations.

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