

**Dedicated workers keep B.C. in the forefront of health care**

**Garth Evans**

**Vancouver Sun, May 7, 2003**

In one of my occupations, I have a substantial amount of contact with a number of British Columbia's top public health experts and epidemiologists. I have been struck by their uniformly high level of competency, dedication and hard work. Behind the scenes, we have a truly impressive team of people working to protect our health. On a day-to-day basis, their efforts go unnoticed. They are seen by the public only when a major health event occurs.

A different situation prevails in Ontario where it appears that large parts of the public health system have been discontinued to cut costs. For instance, one of my physician friends lost his job as a regional health officer because the number of regions was reduced. He is now deputy public health officer in another province. The Ontario public health system was savagely cut back by Mike Harris's government, which, I believe, was the primary reason that it responded so slowly and poorly to the SARS threat.

I don't think it is a coincidence that B.C. has dealt effectively with the SARS problem and Ontario has not. On the plane from Hong Kong that brought SARS to Canada, one infected passenger disembarked in Vancouver and one in Toronto. The Vancouver passenger went to the hospital and was quarantined. The Toronto patient eventually was admitted to hospital in an open ward and infected a number of people.

To its credit, in its efforts to control health care costs the Campbell government did not engage in the type of Ludditeism practised by the Harris government.

The result is that we continue to have an effective public health system and Ontario doesn't. I think credit and blame should be fairly apportioned and we should all be thankful that our public health professionals are still on the job protecting us.

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