



Janet Davis
Toronto City Councillor
Chair, Community Development and Recreation Committee
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BY EMAIL ONLY

January 28, 2010

Dear Ms. Davis:

I am a family physician in Toronto, and an Assistant Professor with the University of Toronto Department of Family and Community Medicine. I am also a member of Health Providers Against Poverty. I am writing regarding the recent directive to social services workers concerning how they will process Special Diet Allowance application forms.

From Toronto Social Services' correspondence with the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, and from the experiences reported by physicians and clients over the past few weeks, it seems there has been a significant shift in your workers' approach to assessing and approving Special Diet Allowance funds. Front line workers appear to be questioning the professional assessment and opinions of health professionals who complete these forms.

I strongly oppose the notion that social services workers should second guess and invalidate the assessment of a health professional. Health professionals are trained to diagnose health conditions, through a combination of history-gathering, physical examination, and diagnostic investigations. A family physician requires ten years of post-secondary training, and the completion of an intensive licensing process to be deemed qualified to make such assessments. I do not believe that a front line social services worker can assume any authority to question these assessments.

Further, this is a threat to the dignity and privacy of people living on social assistance. It is demeaning to be required to discuss one's personal health conditions with staff who are not trained health professionals. It is doubly demeaning to be required to prove the existence of these conditions despite a health provider's declaration of their presence.

I will be informing the Ontario Medical Association, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, the Nurse Practitioners' Association of Ontario, and the Registered Dieticians' Association of Ontario of the City of Toronto's actions to question the assessment of physicians, nurses and dieticians on these forms. I believe that they will find such questioning of their members' ability to make professional judgments a significant challenge to our professions.

I sincerely hope that this policy will be rescinded immediately, to respect the health providers which you rely to assess your clients, and in respect of your clients themselves.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you wish to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gary Bloch".

Gary Bloch MD CCFP

cc: Heather MacVicar, General Manager, Toronto Employment and Social Services
John Clarke, Ontario Coalition Against Poverty