



Citizens' Representative Message

There is an old adage that states if you want to get something done ask a busy person to do it. Well, our Office has certainly been busy over the past few months. Without any change in the methodology used to compile our statistics we have experienced a dramatic increase in ombudsman complaints and inquiries. In 2012-13 we received 393 complaints and inquiries. In 2013-14 the number increased 54% to 607. This year we are on track to receive 854 complaints and inquiries, a 40% increase from the previous year. We have analyzed the statistics and there appears to be a general increase in complaints arising out of all areas of the greater public service. We do not attribute this increase as a general decline in the professionalism of the Public Service, but rather to the institutionalization of our Office. By this I mean citizens are becoming more aware of our role and mandate and the utility we can provide when they navigate various government services and programs.

We have also been busy implementing the Whistleblowing Program enshrined by the *Public Interest Disclosure and Whistleblower Protection Act*. I have met with numerous groups within the Public Service to explain key aspects of the Program. Despite our nascent outreach efforts we have been receiving inquiries and requests for advice from public employees. We are dedicated to ensuring that adequate time is spent with those individuals so that we understand the nature of their allegations, and they understand all aspects of filing a whistleblowing complaint.

Despite the tremendous demands placed upon our Office, all staff have brought their unique creativity and energy to dealing with this workload. I thank them for their efforts.

The OCR Celebrates Whistleblower Day



On October 16th, staff members attended at Confederation Building entrances with the goal of promoting awareness of the *Public Interest Disclosure and Whistleblower Protection Act*. Citizens' Representative Barry Fleming noted "Public employees now have a clear channel to report wrongdoing in their workplaces. Part of what we are doing here at Confederation Building today revolves around reminding them that the OCR is here to listen to their concerns, and we are reinforcing the OCR's commitment to providing neutral, third party investigations of wrongdoing under the new legislation." Public servants were provided with a pamphlet on the program, and given promotional whistles with the OCR logo on them.



Did you know...

The OCR is now part of a working group organized by the Office of the Saskatchewan Ombudsman that brings together designates in each of the provincial Ombudsman offices to discuss issues relating to investigations in the health care sector. The first of what will be quarterly teleconferences took place on November 21.

We deliver!

We have numerous presentations available for public servants and the general public, ranging from public interest disclosure, to our overall mandate, to navigating difficult complaints. Presentations are available by calling (709) 729-7647 or via email at citrep@gov.nl.ca.

Seeking Fairness

As a branch of the Department of Health and Community Services, MCP oversees the comprehensive Medical Insurance Program extended to residents of the province. Part of its role is to liaise with hospitals outside of the province, and Canada, to reimburse other jurisdictions for costs associated with specified types of care.

A man who had been approved for, and received surgery in the United States began receiving bills from the service provider after he returned home. When he contacted MCP he was told that he should not be receiving the bills and was not responsible to pay them. Despite this, and as a result of a discrepancy between the price quoted and the price billed, he continued to receive bills.

He contacted us after he received a letter threatening the matter would be forwarded to a collection agency. Our inquiry to the Department was acted upon immediately and the appropriate actions were taken to resolve the matter in the man's favour.

Finding Solutions

Medical Needs Addressed - Department of Advanced Education and Skills ("AES")

The Department of Advanced Education and Skills (AES) is responsible for determining eligibility for Income Support Benefits. In the absence of any other medical insurance, AES is able to validate drug card coverage through the Newfoundland and Labrador Prescription Drug Program by virtue of assessed financial eligibility. A man called our Office stating that he had recently had his income support reinstated, however, his drug card had not been validated and his pharmacy was unwilling to provide his epilepsy medication without it. The pharmacy was set to close at noon that day, and he would be without medication if the issue wasn't resolved. Our inquiry determined he was entitled to drug card benefits. Our AES contact got in touch with the man directly, as well as the pharmacy to confirm his eligibility, and he received his medication before the pharmacy closed.



Season's Greetings and Best Wishes for a Happy New Year!
Barry Fleming & Staff

Questions? Comments?

Is your department, agency or community group interested in learning more about the OCR, its services and processes? Do you have a suggestion or question to be addressed in a future edition of *Insights*? Call us at 1-800-559-0079 or (709) 729-7647, or e-mail citrep@gov.nl.ca.

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