

Hospital boss gets support of union

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Kingston General Hospital's outspoken CEO received some strong support yesterday from an unlikely ally during a rally at the hospital yesterday.

Louis Rodrigues, who represents 1,400 KGH front-line workers, told a crowd gathered on the edge of Stuart Street that the **Canadian Union of Public Employees** will stand behind KGH CEO Joe deMora and any hospital boss that stands up against cuts to health care by the provincial government.

"We will, under any circumstances, support any CEO, any hospital, anywhere in Ontario," Rodrigues said from the top of a set of outside stairs at the hospital.

He also threatened that attempts to shrink or cut health-care services will be resisted by his members with service shutdowns in the communities where those cuts are made.

With the help of the Kingston and Ontario health coalitions, the union is launching a media-supported campaign to elicit community support against inadequate health-care funding.

The union is paying for TV and radio advertising to support its message and has organized a town hall meeting that will take place at 7 p.m., Nov. 26 at City Hall. Rodrigues said labour leaders and deMora have said they will attend. He's still waiting to learn if local Liberal MPP John Gerretsen will go.

The campaign comes as a result of suggestions made during the provincial election that deMora wouldn't be kept on if the Liberals were reelected because he had made the hospital's financial woes part of a funding debate during the election.

It also comes as a result of a recent comment to the Whig-Standard by Paul Huras, CEO of the South East Local Health Integration Network, who said airing the hospital's fiscal woes hurts its reputation and staff morale.

Huras also said the network can't afford to give KGH the \$13.5 million it needs to pay off its current deficit.

To give KGH the money would mean eliminating one-third of community health service in southeast Ontario, he said.

Rodrigues said those comments were a public chastisement of deMora.

He also suggested Huras has made it clear the regional health authority is trying to encourage competition between the province's health-care providers.

His union won't let that happen and he hopes the community will join **CUPE** members in fighting future health-care cuts, he said.

"This sounds like divide and conquer strategy," he said. "We're not going to allow the LHINs and the provincial government to play one health-care provider against another."

DeMora attended yesterday's rally and acknowledged the support.

"Any time you have a situation where the clinical staff and the hospital and the community are all aligned, that's a good thing," he said in an interview afterward.

While he voiced appreciation for the support, he said he has no critical words for the provincial government or its health networks and said he doesn't feel as if he himself was criticized.

DeMora also said the hospital acted responsibly by informing the community of its fiscal challenges and that he was not admonished by the government for doing so.

"The reaction from the government and [MPP] John Gerretsen has been positive and our discussions with the Local Health Integration Network have also been positive," he said.