

TORONTO, Dec. 6 /CNW/ - The following letter was provided to Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman:

Tuesday, December 5, 2006

Dear Minister Smitherman,

It is my great regret to inform you that, for health reasons, I have stepped down from the position of Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario, effective immediately.

As you may know, I have been off work for the past few weeks due to emergency back surgery. In fact, my back problems were caused by an extremely rare tumour known as a hemangiopericytoma. This is a rare type of vascular tumour, a category which itself comprises only 1% of all cancers. Unfortunately this disease has already spread to other sites and will require many months of further investigation and treatment.

As you might imagine, a decision of this magnitude has been an extremely difficult one for me to make, both professionally and personally. The dual roles of CMOH/ADM have heavy responsibilities that cannot be done by half measures. They demand a more than full-time commitment of energy and dedication to work, carried out under complex and challenging conditions, including but not limited to leadership in times of public health crisis and emergencies.

I have learned so much since my appointment as CMOH/ADM in early 2004 and am just approaching the half-way mark of my legislated 5-year term. I have truly loved the policy & systems perspective afforded by work at the provincial level, and I have never ceased to be amazed by the importance of the issues in my portfolio to the health and well-being of Ontarians. Equally so, I have relished the opportunity to make positive changes, wherever possible, in the working lives of public health and other professionals who deliver such a wide array of important programs and services. I will greatly miss working with so many fine people in the Ontario Public Service, the public health system and beyond, whose dedication, passion and professionalism is truly unparalleled.

George, I want to thank you so much for appointing me to this role and entrusting me with these duties. I have really enjoyed working with yourself, Premier McGuinty and your many Cabinet colleagues and staff. I will always appreciate the personal support you extended to me over the years and hope that some day I may have the opportunity to extend the same to you.

It has been an honour and an immense privilege to serve as Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario. I am confident that the many goals and challenges that lie before us are in good hands, and I extend to you and your colleagues in government my very best wishes for continued success in this worthwhile endeavour.

Sincerely,

Dr. Sheela Basrur
Chief Medical Officer of Health and
Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Health