

ONEIG SUMMER 2023



ONTARIO NURSES FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Official Newsletter of ONEIG
An RNAO Interest Group

The Erie Situation: A Personal Reflection

By Dominique Baillargeon

On February 16th, 2023, I had the pleasure of viewing a screening of “The Erie Situation” at my local cinema. This film explores the 2014 water crisis in Toledo, Ohio, when a highly toxic algae bloom entered the drinking water from Lake Erie. It also discusses the politics and science behind this issue and the main culprits of the toxic algae.

While watching this film, I was truly in shock at how green the water appeared to be and how this contaminated water was supposed to be the source of drinking water for the citizens of Toledo. To combat the deadly algae blooms, running water was unavailable for three days. This meant no running water for drinking, cooking, brushing your teeth, bathing, etc. This contamination also had detrimental impacts on aquatic ecosystems and subsequently led to a rapid decline in the fish population, thus negatively affecting the fishing industry in the area. In addition, the algae blooms impacted the overall health of humans and prevented people from enjoying the many attractions that come with the Great Lakes.

You’re probably thinking, what’s the main cause of these massive algae blooms? How can we prevent them? Throughout the film, I learned that agricultural runoff pollution (e.g. manure, fertilizers) ends up making its way into freshwater systems and quickly feeds algae and cyanobacteria (blue-green algae), which is the main culprit for these large-scale algae blooms. If you combine this with warm temperatures (commonly in shallow waters) and lots of sunlight, this creates the perfect environment for algae blooms to thrive. Once an algae bloom starts, it can be very difficult and expensive to treat, oftentimes at a cost to the ecosystem.

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According to the film, Joe Hammon, a certified organic farmer in Ohio, believes that others should adopt organic farming to help protect farming land, the water, and the people who consume the crops. Personally, I feel that if the majority of agricultural industries made the shift to organic and sustainable farming, the incidence of algae blooms would drastically decrease, which, in turn, would help save our drinking water and the biodiversity of the Great Lakes.

If you're interested in learning more about The Erie Situation or would like to request a film screening, please visit <https://www.theeriesituation.com/>. You can also donate on the website to help support educational programs related to The Erie Situation. Donations will be made to Plastics Oceans International, a non-profit.

References:

Castle, A. (2022, October 4). Five years later: Lessons from the Toledo water crisis. Alliance for the Great Lakes. <https://greatlakes.org/2019/08/five-years-later-lessons-from-the-toledo-water-crisis/>
The Erie Situation. (2022). The Erie Situation. <https://www.theeriesituation.com/>



“To leave the world better than you found it, sometimes you have to pick up other people’s trash.”

—BILL NYE

SAVE THE DATE!

ONEIG will be hosting (online) its Annual General Meeting on September 20th from 7:00-9:00pm EST. We are planning to bring in a speaker to talk about healthcare waste and also look forward to connect with you, our members! More details to come!

Environmental Health Inequities

By: Olivia Brundia RN

This summer in Northeastern Ontario it was not hard to see tragedies exacerbated by climate change and environmental degradation. The government reports 34 active wildfires in the Northeast district alone as of August 10/23. On more than one occasion this summer I had to warn my inpatients about the poor outdoor air quality and provide teaching on health risks associated with spending prolonged time outdoors. For weeks it smelled like burnt wood throughout the Nipissing district. Code greys were called in some of the smaller district hospitals due to poor air quality. Blue-green algae blooms have been occurring with increased frequency in local lakes due in part to phosphorus pollution and increased water temperatures.

Seasonal flooding has become more common. My own parents' house flooded this spring due to the abnormally abrupt snow melt...repeatedly. Two big things the wildfires, algae blooms, air quality, and flooding all have in common is that: they all caught media attention, and subsequently became part of public discourse. While it can be debated whether this has led to any meaningful political action or environmental protections- it was still at the forefront of many citizens' minds throughout the 2023 summer. However, there are many other areas where the impact of climate change and environmental devastation is less prevalent to some members of the public.

Specifically, I am referring to environmental discrimination.

This form of discrimination permeates throughout laws, policies, and societal practices which have left many Canadians in vulnerable positions (i.e.: consider how many boil water advisories exist in Indigenous communities).

Industrial sites with higher rates of pollution tend to be built near lower-income neighbourhoods, toxic chemicals are found in higher amounts in products advertised to people of colour, and lack of funding for adequate enforcement of environmental regulations is often prevalent in areas where racialized Canadians reside (David Suzuki Foundation, 2021).

Environmental discrimination leads to health inequities amongst many minority communities and can reduce average life expectancies.

This form of discrimination is often discussed as it pertains to race but does impact other stigmatized groups as well. As Pride events continue throughout the province this summer it is worth acknowledging that the 2SLGBTQIA+ population has also long suffered the effects of environmental discrimination. Some hypothesized reasons for these disparities are because 2SLGBTQIA+ folks were historically forcibly clustered in higher pollution areas, and are often socially excluded in other residential spaces (Collins, Grineski, 2017).

Discrimination impacting other Social Determinants of Health (i.e.: employment, education, income) also limits this community's ability to move out of unhealthy environmental districts, and successfully access primary health care services (Goldsmith & Bell, 2022). Hate crimes have been rising against this group for the last few years in Canada with 2023 looking like no exception. For nurses, this should cause a growing concern that environmental health disparities will also increase in the 2SLGBTQIA+ population.

Why care about this a nurse?

- These Canadians will be, or already are your patients.
 - Environmental health issues will continue to increase for years to come
 - Part of the role of a nurse is to assist with health promotion and risk management for your patients.
- What can I do about this as a nurse?
- Write to your local government representatives about your concerns
 - Write to your local newsletter or media outlet about your concerns
 - Engage in continuous learning about the environment and possible health impacts to improve your nursing practice
 - Engage in political action. Sign action alerts/campaigns on relevant topics
 - Vote in elections for representatives that support environmental protections and healthcare reform
 - Consider donating your time or money to organizations that advocate for environmental justice for all communities
 - Reflect on your own lifestyle and reduce your carbon emissions
 - Assess your own workplace's policies for "greening" opportunities

My RNAO AGM Report and rambling story

By Rob Samulack ONEIG Co-chair

What a whirlwind two days! I got up at 4:30 a bit sleep deprived, biked surprisingly fast to the Ottawa train station and took the 5:30 train to Toronto. I took the PATH and walked underground, away from traffic, from Union Station to the Toronto Hilton.

It turned out that I was a bit early, but that turned into a huge opportunity. The RNAO board of directors meeting was going on. On top of being able to snag a free lunch (with permission), I took the time to turn email contacts into real, in-person relationships. I had a long strategy chat with the Director of Policy, Matthew Kellway. He is completely behind ONEIG and our initiative.

After a face-to-face hello with the RNAO CEO Dr. Doris Grinspun, I was able to set a date and time in her jam-packed schedule to meet with her and discuss ONEIG-led projects and campaigns.

I chatted with Susan McNeil who is in charge of BPG implementation and discussed the resolution that ONEIG had proposed to edit all new or reviewed Best Practice Guidelines (BPGs) with a climate impact, climate justice and ecological determinants of health lens. The next day, she introduced me to Lyndsay Howitt, BPG development lead, who is going to take this idea into serious consideration. I introduced her to ONEIG's formidable Hilda Swirsky who is interested in taking on this role as a stakeholder reviewer. If any other ONEIG members are interested in such a role, email us and we will put you in touch!

I also had a long conversation with the new RNAO President-elect, Lhamo Dolkar, telling her of ONEIG's ambitious plans to send a team to COP28 and the huge undertaking of greening Canada's healthcare supply chain. She is very supportive and may join me in Ottawa to bring our proposal to Health Canada.

I had the opportunity to meet informally with several RNAO board members, staff and nursing student representatives.



The evening was filled with the opening ceremonies. It started with a Caribbean Carnival dance parade. In Dr. Grinspun's address, she mentioned the "climate disaster", ecological determinants of health and the necessity for urgent action on numerous occasions. Thanks to ONEIG's tireless efforts, planetary health is becoming one of RNAO's central pillar issues.

Sylvia Jones, the embattled Minister of Health and Deputy Premier made her dutiful appearance. Her remarks were met with a mixed reaction. NDP leader, Marit Stiles, had a rousing speech, shaming the government for Bill 124 and several remarks about the need for climate action.

The Interim Liberal leader and my local MPP, John Fraser, mentioned the environment and gave a passionate speech the nursing journey of his recently deceased mother. She was a nurse who taught him the sense of duty to the people who you are charged with caring for. He is also a long-time advocate of palliative care, including Roger Nielsen House of whom my son was a patient of their perinatal hospice program. My late son Aaron's 7th birthday would have been this past Monday, June 19th. John was heading back home to Ottawa that night as his mother's funeral was the next day. His attending this AGM demonstrates the value of duty that his mother instilled in him. John's take-home message was, "If you want to keep nurses, you have to pay them, period."

Green party leader, Mike Schreiner, was the last political guest in attendance to speak. He gave a good speech on the environment, health and improving conditions for nurses. Unfortunately for him, he had to follow John's very emotional and moving speech - in my opinion, Schreiner really didn't stand a chance, although it was a valiant attempt.

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After such a long day, I went to my room, which I was sharing with a nurse who has shared a very similar nursing career path to me - relatively new to the profession, had done hospital nursing and then moved to community visit nursing as the lifestyle was far healthier and sustainable. Personally, I miss the adrenaline rush of emerg, but I don't miss being continuously sick due to the stress of chronic understaffing or never seeing my kids. The two of us had a great conversation and come September, we may have a new recruit to our ONEIG executive!

The next day came fast. I hit the fitness center for a quick workout, cooled off in the indoor-outdoor saltwater pool and then headed down to the conference.

Dr. Grinspun gave her report and mentioned the "climate disaster" at least six times. For her grandson, like many other 15 year olds, climate action is his number one issue. Like I want to see a future for my two kids, Dr. Grinspun wants to a future for her grandson.

Once the reports were finished, it was time for member's voices. I was first in line! I talked about how the wildfire smoke, fueled by human-caused climate change, is a health issue causing asthma and COPD exacerbations, and when the fine particles enter our bloodstream leading to heart attacks and strokes. I gave a few other examples and then I talked about how RNAO, through ONEIG's efforts, are being leaders in planetary health. How we have provisional admission to the UN Climate Change Conference, COP28, in November and how Dr. Grinspun has agreed to fund a team to go. I talked about the advocacy work on legislation that have done. I talked about the action alert on wildfires that RNAO is set to publish - please sign it! I also talked about how the healthcare system is a leading emitter of greenhouse gases - 5.2% of total global emissions. About two-thirds of that is due to our supply chain. ONEIG and RNAO is leading the charge to implement sustainable procurement practices (more about that to come in a future article!). I also encouraged the general RNAO membership to join the ONEIG exec and come help us with this necessary work.

My co-chair, Josalyn Radcliffe, and I accompanied Dr. Grinspun and the Chilean BPSO contingent to the Student's luncheon. ONEIG's own Emma Ayukawa won the Student of Distinction Award (<https://rnao.ca/about/awards/recognition-awards/student-of-distinction-emma-ayukawa>). Dr. Leigh Chapman, Canada's Chief Nursing Officer, gave the keynote speech. She is such an inspiring nurse leader. RNAO's Director of Policy, Matthew Kellway, introduced me to her at the end. After everyone had left, I sat down with her as she finally got to eat her lunch - another sign of both a dedicated nurse and a real leader! I told her of RNAO and ONEIG's ambitious plans to be leaders in planetary health by going to COP28 and to green our supply chain. She is going to facilitate meetings within Health Canada to get this project underway.



ONEIG Co-Chairs Rob Samulack (left) & Josalyn Radcliffe (right) at RNAO AGM in June 2023

I was late to the resolution portion of the AGM, but the meeting with Dr. Chapman was worth it! We got some important resolutions passed including amending some points to get a resolution written by the passionate ONEIG member Margarita Salvatore passed. An important resolution about improving the mental health of nursing students was sent to the RNAO board. Some others were about increasing the number of Black RNs entering NP programs, improving access to NCLEX exams for graduate nurses in northern Ontario and creating regional harm reduction nurse coordinators.

After the resolutions, there were some awards and then closing remarks. After, Josalyn, Hilda and I took some time to catch-up. While I have had countless Zoom meetings with Hilda, I had never met her in person before today.

Then we parted ways. Hilda and Josalyn headed to the President's Dinner, while I had to unfortunately head back to Union Station to go home.

At the President's Dinner the final awards were handed out.

If you go to the top RNAO Recognition Awards webpage (<https://rnao.ca/about/awards/recognition-awards>), you will notice who is listed for the first and most prestigious of the annual awards. It is my passionate and dedicated co-chair,

Josalyn, who took home the Award of Merit (<https://rnao.ca/about/awards/recognition-awards/award-of-merit-josalyn-radcliffe>) for her invaluable leadership and mentorship with ONEIG. Additionally, since this was the first in-person RNAO AGM since the start of the pandemic, Hilda finally got presented with her Lifetime Award

(<https://rnao.ca/about/awards/recognition-awards/lifetime-achievement-award-hilda-swirsky>). Though I feel that I have gotten to know Hilda quite well over the past couple of years, she has done so much and touched so many people's lives that I only know a snippet of her story. She has been a real mentor to me taking on this role as co-chair. Her wisdom and longtime institutional knowledge is invaluable.

I had what I anticipated would be a quick dinner, but in true Via Rail fashion, my train was over an hour late in departing. Improving the efficiency, reliability and affordability of our inter-urban train services in Canada is another important piece of climate action, especially if we don't want more highways built! But that is another project for another day.

Despite that, I still prefer the train to driving the 401 back to Ottawa. Not stress of traffic, beautiful scenery along the lakefront and then the bogs of eastern Ontario. I can be productive - like writing this article! Please forgive how verbose it is - I ramble when I am tired. I also got to spontaneously meet a retired nurse leader who happened to sit beside me. She had taken the epic train trip all the way from Vancouver to the outskirts of the GTA. She was coming home from her son's wedding. However, it is a small world. Before retiring, she had been a member of ONEIG and worked under Hilda at Mount Sinai! I certainly hope that she is reading this. We had such an uplifting conversation. I would not have had that spontaneous interaction had I driven home on the 401!

I also would not have had similar interactions or made vital connections with nursing leaders to advance ONEIG's important work. These conferences cost a lot of money and have a definite carbon footprint, but those in-person relationship-building and spontaneous interactions advance the work so much faster than Zoom. Flying a team to COP28 in Dubai will have similar criticisms but the benefits of the relationship building to solve the almost incomprehensibly large problem of climate change is necessary. And, that is why RNAO is sending a team.

I shall be back in Ottawa soon. Hopefully, my bike is still locked to the bike rack where I left it. It has been a good two days!

On Connection

By Josalyn Radcliffe RN, Co-Chair

I often think about how much more we could do as ONEIG with more energy: fewer days of despair and grief, and more days of hope and collective action. But these days, even when I crumble to a deep-seated sadness in the face of our ecological crises, it has been this ONEIG community and others within this movement that have tossed me a rope so I can climb out of despair.

Whether it is directly encouraging me or in the ways I see you have joined us in conversations and action with family, friends, co-workers, and organizations, it is the hope and collective care that sees me through. It gives me strength so I can walk back into this work (my favourite recent mantra “I can’t do everything, but I can do something”).

It is these connections, these relationships, that I spoke about in my short talk upon receiving the ‘Award of Merit’. I know most of you could not attend the Annual General Meeting, so I share the transcript below (and I just uploaded to our Youtube channel: <https://youtu.be/jCqk4BPcsWQ>).

“A huge thank-you to the team I work with, ONEIG, for nominating me for this honour. Thank you for creating a community centred on care and giving me the confidence to step into new areas every single day. I also want to thank my husband, who’s up there videotaping (sidenote: this comment really dates me!), our kids Matilda and Ellie, our parents too who are along supporting us, and my supervisors Dr. Warren Dodd and Dr. Kelly Skinner at the University of Waterloo and my colleagues there. And my friends for daily motivation, support and care, and a huge thank you to the RNAO for your work and the passion that you bring to addressing the ecological crises that define health today.

From huge mistakes of broken climate promises, water and land destruction of farms, wetlands, and forests, and the for-profitization of healthcare that we are seeing from the government today, we all know that we need a change that prioritizes life, health, over profit.

None of us have all of the answers but I know for certain we need to walk in another direction. And more than ever we need one another. And I have been listening and hearing and seeing that relationships are really the key, the way forward. And I was hearing that recently from Dr. Kelsey Leonard, who has been championing the Water Back movement. Relationships with one another, relationships with our natural world, relationships with Indigenous knowledge and leaders who are here to lead the way. So I want to thank you all for this huge honour and for this community that we share and I feel a part of because of all of you.

And I dedicate this little moment that’s here to moving towards deeper connections and care for the world that we want today and tomorrow and walking together on a better path.”



Updates from Hilda Swirsky RN

During this time of so many frequent, intense, worldwide extreme weather events and continuous evidence of a hotter planet, ONEIG, collaborating with Beth Emeth's Greening Committee and the Canadian Association of Nurses for the Environment took a deep breath and presented their summer, August 1st program addressing the Transformative Power of Nature which impacts our commonality of breathing. No matter what our differences are, we are united as one as we breathe in and out; from a newborn's first breath until our last breath at the end of our lives. Recently, with so much wildfire smoke having occurred, we have become acutely aware of the impact of poorer air quality that seems to have affected the entire planet and numerous environmental disasters resulting in environmental refugees who have lost all their worldly possessions and are faced with starting over with only the clothes they wore when they escaped with their lives.

During our program, diverse presenters including our very special guest speaker Dr. Melissa Lem shared examples and sources of evidence of how we and our planet are healthier utilizing the transformative power of nature. York Centre's City of Toronto Councillor James Pasternak shared his greening Toronto action plan for updating parks and green spaces. He supports the creation of infrastructures that integrates work, home life, active transportation and greening spaces including increasing the tree canopy, and having accessible playgrounds and pathways, to achieve an integrated, accessible, equitable and greener Toronto.

Rabbi Morrison pointed out that right from Genesis, we are commanded to be environmental stewards with and in our commandments such as Sabbath, where once a week, we rest from work and have time to be able to walk leisurely outdoors and enjoy the sights and smells. On one of the happiest days of the year, Tu B'Av, men and women danced in the forests as they hoped to meet and match with loving partners. Dr. Melissa Lem shared numerous research studies and data that are now available to prove the boost to physical and mental well-being that being in nature for 20 minutes twice a week brings. Backed by this researched evidence, Melissa spoke about how good nature is for our brains and how rewarding she feels writing Parx Prescriptions for her patients and therefore contributing to their personal and planetary health. Research identifies that 90% of us say we're happier when we are outside and our stress hormone levels drop significantly after just 15 minutes. Increasing our time in nature reduces our risks of developing heart disease, high blood pressure and diabetes.

Being in nature, two hours a week for 20 minutes is easy to do as we connect with our families and friends. You can find her presentation on the Greening Committee's website or on Youtube.

I also spoke about AQHI, how it is a communication tool that empowers us all to take action when air quality is not optimum so that we remain in control of making wise choices in order to feel healthier when wildfire smoke or pollutants impact air quality and we exercise our choice of rescheduling or reducing outdoor strenuous activities.

Prior to our program, during RNAO's AGM, Rob and I met members of RNAO's Best Practice Guidelines Team who are very interested in having ONEIG members contribute our environmental footprint to the development of further BPGs ensuring that we incorporate an environmental lens to future BPGs.

With over 50 BPGs already developed, we are looking forward to contributing to future BPG development as Stakeholders ensuring we share and capture environmental data and research within future BPGs.

The BPG team consists of multiple topic and guideline experts who provide their data and research to the development of that BPG. Data and research come from anywhere in the world. Within this draft format, all are invited to participate as stakeholders when RNAO puts out a general call to all who have expertise on the topic to review that BPG and provide feedback. The timeline from that call-out to submitting feedback is very short but so rewarding knowing that our feedback is valued and therefore has the potential to alter the finalized BPG.

Stay updated for your opportunity to participate in upcoming BPG development in the next few months.



Environmental Headlines

By: Cleo Danforth RN

Many articles and videos have made their way into my news algorithm this week on the topic of geoengineering, the shipping lanes of the North Atlantic, and considering our perspectives on intentional climate manipulation.

The story is - in 2020 the UN's International Maritime Organization passed legislation that required cargo ships to burn cleaner fuel. This was undoubtedly a win for combatting global air pollution. However, the exhaust from the old, dirtier fuel contained sulphur particles, each sulphur particle creating a "seed" for water droplets to cling to and create clouds – a process called "cloud seeding". The effect is trails of sulphur-seeded clouds following cargo ships as they move back and forth across the ocean, big enough to be seen on satellite imagery of shipping lanes.

However, fewer sulphur particles in the new, cleaner fuel have meant seeding fewer clouds and consequentially providing less cloud cover for the ocean and allowing it to sit in direct sunlight for longer. According to Tianle Yuan, an atmospheric physicist of the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center, what we're seeing now is the true impact of the heat without our old, unintentionally protective layer of shipping lane clouds.

One significant upside to this discovery is the accompanying knowledge that we can potentially re-create this effect with simple seawater. Like sulphur, salt particles in ocean spray can seed clouds. By studying the effects of removing human interference with natural climate systems, researchers have been able to see exactly what kind of effects we could create in the future with intentional geoengineering of this same problem.

This development gives us much to consider. The concept of geoengineering at any real scale has historically been divisive, with strong arguments for taking all possible steps including intentional manipulation of climate and weather. There have also been strong arguments against continuing to meddle clumsily with natural systems, regardless of intentions. The ethics of these types of choices are an interesting, evolving conversation, and one will require much thought and discussion by all of us in the coming years.

Auditor General Report: Unpacking Power and Politics in the 'Greenbelt Swap'

By Josalyn Radcliffe RN, Co-Chair

In case you missed it, a scathing report was just released by Ontario's Auditor General regarding the 'land swap'* of Ontario Greenbelt land, noting that the majority of the areas that are slated for removal were driven by developer lobbying and decisions by minister Clark. In fact, just after winning the 2022 election, Premier Ford directed Clark via a mandate letter that required him to "complete work to codify processes for swaps, expansions, contractions, and policy updates for the Greenbelt." -CBC report August 9, 2023: "Ontario government's Greenbelt land swap influenced by well-connected developers, AG finds"

Check out The Alliance for a Liveable Ontario (www.liveableontario.ca) for opportunities to learn about not only the Greenbelt but housing security and sustainability as well!

*the idea that this is a fair 'swap' is contested by many who highlighted that the land being swapped in to be protected was already protected through other mechanisms

Ontario government's Greenbelt land swap influenced by well-connected developers, AG finds
| CBC News

New York City Climate Talks

September is a big month for climate advocacy and action. In New York City, the United Nations is hosting 'Climate Ambition Summit 2023' with three intersecting tracks guiding discussion: ambition r/t governments and especially large emitters; credibility r/t cities, corporations, and institutions; and implementation which includes highlighting partnerships that speed up decarbonization. Alongside these talks in NYC will be the very much interconnected SDG (Sustainable Development Goal) Summit as well.

For more information, check out: <https://sdg.iisd.org/events/climate-ambition-summit-2023/>

Striking for Climate Action

Alongside these talks, September 15, 2023, is the date of this year's 'Global Strike for Climate.' Keep an eye on Fridaysforfuture.org for details on strikes near you. If you are attending an event this year or are part of other environmental actions (including advocacy with your local politicians), please reach out! We would love to hear from you at oneigrnao@gmail.com



A final sign off

It has been a pleasure to bring you the last 8 editions of the ONEIG newsletter over the past two years. As my term as Communications ENO comes to an end, I would like to take a moment to say thank you to the wonderful executive team I have had the joy of working with and all ONEIG members. Your passion, care and commitment to the health of people and the environment make a difference.

Thank you for our time together. Shine on!

Best, Jess Burford RN, MN-LPNP, GNC(C)

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