

NEW

Directions

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Meet Debbie Fischer

Our new transition lead is already hard at work developing a comprehensive project plan for the ministry

The ministry's progress towards its stewardship role took a big leap forward with the appointment of Debbie Fischer as the new Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM) of the transition team. Fischer is a seasoned organizational development professional with many years of experience in the health care sector. Deputy Minister Ron Sapsford said he is "delighted" that the ministry would benefit from her leadership and expertise.

"In January I said that the broad outlines of the ministry's new direction were there, but the detailed planning still had to be done," said Sapsford. "Now that Debbie's on board, she's very quickly identifying what the key priorities are, what the sequencing should look like, and what the final organizational structures of divisions will be."

Sapsford acknowledged that with these refinements to the plan, the new roadmap may vary somewhat from the initial phasing presented in January, but the end result will be the same — to establish a new structure and processes that will better serve the ministry as stewards of the health care system.

Maintaining consistency and promoting integration between and among the divisions will be a key element of Fischer's mandate, according to Sapsford. "In the new organization, all divisions will work interdependently, creating more effective and efficient use of our employees' time and expertise," he said. "Debbie has extensive experience in this area and she will be bringing her ideas to the senior management table."

Leading the transition is a

big job and a big responsibility, and Sapsford emphasized that results won't appear overnight. However, he said that Fischer's arrival is an important step and that the work she leads will complement other transition projects that had been initiated prior to her arrival.

For example, Sapsford said, "The ADMs and I have been meeting over the past couple of months, looking at alternative organizational structures. We've been asking, how does the process of stewardship change the business processes that we'll be using, and then how does that translate to changes in the organizational structure?"

Also, he reported that the Information Management groups in the Health Results Team and the Health System Strategy Division have already completed a significant amount of work around strategic planning, including establishing priorities for the future and developing tools to measure success. The next step — which will bring Fischer's talents to bear — will be to finalize the divisional structures for each of the ADMs. Meanwhile, interviews for the new

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One-on-one with Debbie Fischer

ADM for Health System Information Management is underway.

Of course, the ministry doesn't operate in a vacuum. We asked Sapsford how our stakeholders have been responding to the ministry's transition. "They have been quietly watching," he replied, "but as I've said to them there is no change until change is announced. I have asked them to carry on in their normal relationships with current ministry staff and departments. Their questions to me are most often around how they will relate to the ministry in the future."

That's an issue Fischer, Sapsford, and the entire senior management team will be working hard to resolve over the coming months, as the LHINs evolve and start to take on a more visible role with stakeholders.

Sapsford emphasized that ministry employees, like the stakeholders, must remain focused on their present responsibilities. "We're on track with respect to our transition plans but we have a huge agenda to manage as a ministry. Keeping our business moving is the first priority to serve the government and the people of Ontario. The day-to-day work still needs to go on," he said. "As we announce changes and make changes, staff will become engaged more directly."

The corridor leading to Debbie Fischer's new office at

the ministry is quiet — for now.

Soon, it will be a hub of activity as she assembles the transition team that will make the ministry's stewardship objective a reality.

Fischer told NEW Directions that she's excited by the opportunities and challenges of her new role, and is looking forward to meeting with the other ADMs, the Deputy

Minister and ministry staff as she

works to implement her mandate.



What were your first thoughts when you heard about this opportunity?

Given my background working with organizations leading change and knowing health care, I thought this would be a very interesting opportunity. The strategy is right and all the elements, such as the LHIN structure, are in place for the ministry to recreate itself and move forward into the future. I am very excited to be part of this initiative.

Can you tell us about your experience managing transformation in other organizations?

I'm seconded from Toronto's Mount Sinai Hospital, and my job there was senior vice president of Organizational Development and Strategic Projects. I was responsible for transformation in the hospital, including specific organizational, human resource and performance strategies, with the goal of improving the level of performance in the hospital. Prior to that, as a consultant at two international professional services — Ernst & Young and then Capgemini Ernst & Young — I worked with organizations to lead transformation and change initiatives.

So whether we were integrating business units, acquiring business units or outsourcing opportunities, all the large transformations required my assistance and I was very involved in them. Throughout my career, most of my clients have been in the health care or public sector domain, and I have a Masters in Health Administration. My skill set, my training and what I enjoy, are related to understanding organizational issues and trying to improve organizations. That's really what I've focused on.

What makes this transition different? What are its particular challenges and opportunities?

All transformations have similar elements, in the sense that change

is hard, cultural change takes a long time and you can only impact it in incremental ways. If you really want to see change, it doesn't happen overnight. What makes this particular one different is that we are trying to be a different type of organization. We're trying to have a different strategic focus, so you have to align people, resources, processes, and the culture with that. Also, the ministry is such a complex organization and it's highly visible so people are watching us. The good news is that because there are a lot of similarities with other transformations, I'll be able to incorporate learnings from my own experience and from best practice or tools of the trade.

Everything I do will be tied into the ministry's transition strategy and stewardship objective. My job is to help transform the ministry by putting structures in place that will help us achieve changes in the health system that will result in better outcomes for the people of Ontario.

Do you have a transition project plan?

A good project plan is critical to the success of a major organizational change. I am developing a detailed plan for all of the project activities of the transition. The plan outlines in chronological order all of the project activities, the deliverables, the changes that need to happen to support new business processes in the ministry, and the known milestones. I will also have a project management office that will work with the divisions and project teams to make sure that the plan activities are moving along in a coordinated way and that we keep to the timelines.

Debbie Fischer (centre), Assistant Deputy Minister of Transition, works with two members of her project team, Jean Cormier and Steve Pinkus. To read the backgrounds of the new team members to date, please see page 5.



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Who will be on your transition team?

My focus is to hire from within the ministry if I can – there’s a lot of good talent here. Based on my project plan I’ll know what resources I’ll need, and then I will work with the Human Resources Branch to advertise for different roles and invite applications. The transition timeline has already been set and is ambitious, so I need to make sure there’s a good match between the work that needs to get done and the skill sets of team members. Primarily, the roles I will need to fill will be senior positions in project management, organizational change, organizational design, and leadership development. I will also be tapping into people in the ministry for their content expertise and advice in support of a project.

Who else at the ministry will you be working closely with?

The other ADMs and the Deputy Minister are my steering committee and I’m here to work with them to facilitate the change. I will check in with them on a weekly basis to let them know how things are progressing in their individual divisions and how we expect to meet our overall objectives.

My role is to ensure that we’re all on the same page of what we need to do. People on the transition team responsible for implementing changes within a division will need to work closely with those staff. And, I know that I will work closely with the Communications and Information Branch to make sure that employees are kept up to date on our progress, and with the Human Resources Branch as we begin to transition the roles of staff and identify learning opportunities related to the reorganization.

Also, as part of the project plan, I will engage many people throughout the organization to get their input. The model I’ve always used is to go to the individuals who are directly involved and get their perspective. The best ideas generally come from the people who are actually working to do the things that we are trying to enhance or improve.

What will your first steps be in implementing your plan?

Basically, I’ve identified all the elements of the transition that I need to get done. The next step will be to meet with the people who own those elements — for example, a divisional lead to discuss the specific organizational requirements in a division. Through these discussions, we can begin to develop the new organizational structure, to define new processes for how each division will conduct their day-to-day business and to plan for how employees will move into their new roles. As the transition rolls out across the ministry, staff will be called upon to work more closely together in the new cross-functional structure. So, I will be working quickly upfront with management to ensure that

the proper resources and training are in place to support these new relationships between divisions.

How about communicating with stakeholders? What will your strategy be?

An important part of the overall transition plan will be regular communications with stakeholders. As key partners in the health care system, they need to understand what we’re doing here, where they fit in and who their point of contact is going to be. Communications to stakeholders will be co-coordinated through the transition project management office, with specific content provided by the divisions, to better ensure that stakeholders understand and embrace the ministry’s new stewardship role.

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Do you have any words of wisdom for staff as we start the transition?

Keep in mind that most organizations go through change. The Deputy Minister has been extremely open to date in terms of the plan and I will continue to keep staff up to date on major initiatives that they will see happening around them. For their part, staff need to stay focused on their roles rather than focusing on the noise and the ambiguity. We have a commitment not to disrupt our business. The transformation is a parallel, well-orchestrated process that will be brought into place as the business proceeds. The work that ministry staff are doing still needs to get done. Meanwhile, people should always speak to their managers if they have any questions, and continue to use the 'A new direction' feedback mechanisms in place.

What are your goals for this transition? How would you like to see it unfold?

There are many goals, but at the end of the day the key is for efficient business processes to be put in place that will enable the ministry to meet its stewardship objective in the new environment. I want to orchestrate a transition that's smooth and that allows people to have new opportunities.

NEW Directions

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Do you have questions about the organizational change?

- Ask your manager
- E-mail your questions or comments to the feedback account at anewdirection@moh.gov.on.ca
- Call the feedback line at 1-888-862-0528 or TTY: 1-800-387-5559

Staffing up the transition team

In early June, Debbie Fischer announced the first members of the transition office, who will be responsible for helping to develop and implement the ministry's transition plan.

Jean Cormier

Jean Cormier is the director of Strategic Human Resources and Ministry Transition. She will support the transition, lead the strategic units of the Human Resources Branch, and work on the OPS Human Resources Service Delivery Transformation Project.

Cormier is a senior human resources professional with change management expertise. Prior to joining the OPS, she held vice-president and director positions in the financial services industry including Investors Group, Mackenzie Financial, and the CIBC Group of Companies. Cormier began her human resources career in the public and education sector, where she held senior positions with organizations such as the Corporation of the Town of Markham and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

Cormier is a Certified Human Resources Professional, as certified by the Human Resources Professionals Association of Ontario, and has studied business and public administration.

Ron Buckle

Ron Buckle has been retained to work with the Acute Services and Community Health Divisions. His initial work will be on the transition plan for the regional office structure.

Buckle brings a great depth of knowledge in business process improvement, information technology, and project management, as well as broad operational experience in finance and human resources. Prior to joining the ministry, he was a consultant with

professional service firms Ernst & Young and Capgemini and most recently was the CEO of Hospital Business Services, an organization that provides hospitals with services to integrate their non-clinical, back office administrative functions, allowing them to focus on delivering quality care to patients. Buckle has led many restructuring and transformation initiatives, including large projects to integrate and restructure six municipal electric utilities to create the new Toronto Hydro.

He is a Chartered Accountant who holds a Bachelor of Science degree and has attended executive training at the University of Western Ontario's Ivey Business School and the Harvard Business School.

Steve Pinkus

Steve Pinkus has been retained to be the program management lead for the transition project office. His role initially will be to develop an overall project plan, and then to support the team in various aspects of the change.

Pinkus, an organizational change management professional with 12 years of consulting experience, has led and managed project teams in large scale strategic change efforts for many sectors including banking, technology, utilities, and transportation. He also has a decade of managerial experience in organizational development, change management, and human resources.

He holds a Bachelor of Arts degree, a Masters in Business Administration and Certified Human Resources Professional and Project Management Professional designations. Pinkus has taught organizational behaviour for the Human Resource Certificate program at the Human Resources Professional Association of Ontario, and for Toronto's Ryerson Polytechnical Institute.