

NEW

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Direction

**Sustainment Unit
launches to help embed
stewardship culture**

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Sue Janzen photos

**Debbie
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change the
way the
ministry does
business**

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Lorraine Deska, Manager,
Transition Change
Management Team

The ministry's senior leaders are all smiles as they congratulate and bid a fond farewell to Debbie Fischer (front and centre), former Assistant Deputy Minister (ADM), Transition. Fischer wrapped up her time at the ministry in September after attending her final Ministry Management Committee (MMC) meeting. During her tenure, she worked closely with the ministry's senior leadership to successfully shepherd the transition. Joining Fischer are (from left): Helen Stevenson, ADM and Executive Officer, Ontario Public Drugs Programs; Ron Sapsford, Deputy Minister; Ken Deane, ADM, Health System Accountability and Performance; Janice Crawford, Director, Legal Services Branch; Dr. Joshua Tepper, ADM, Health Human Resources Strategy; Adalsteinn Brown, ADM, Health System Strategy; Allison Stuart, Acting ADM, Public Health; Dawn Ogram, ADM, Corporate and Direct Services; Kevin Finnerty, Executive Director, Communications and Information Branch; and John McKinley, ADM, Health System Information Management and Investment. Absent: Dr. Arlene King, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Public Health; Alice Keung, Chief Information Officer, Health Services I & IT Cluster; and Dr. Les Levin, Head and Senior Medical Scientific and Health Technology Advisor, Medical Advisory Secretariat.

Debbie Fischer, former Assistant Deputy Minister of Transition, left a mark on the ministry that goes well beyond changes to an organizational chart. Fischer, who helped shepherd the transition to stewardship wrapped up her time with the ministry in September.

“My job was to facilitate the vision. The leadership always came from the Deputy Minister and senior team. I’m leaving things in good hands,” Fischer said in an interview in the weeks leading up to her departure.

The ministry is where it is today in large part because of Fischer’s skills in guiding transformational change and building strong relationships, which were essential to make the transition a reality, said Kevin Finnerty, Executive Director, Communications and Information Branch. “We have experienced the most substantial change the ministry has

undergone since its creation. Without her, quite frankly, we wouldn’t be where we are today,” Finnerty explained.

“Her knowledge of restructuring is unsurpassed and her ability to work with others is excellent. She is a tremendous leader and listener and is able to understand people’s needs.”

Open lines of communication

Looking back, Fischer said she understandably sensed a lot of trepidation when she initially arrived at the ministry in May 2006, with the mandate to guide its transition to stewardship. “There was a lot of pent up anxiety. Announcements had been made and staff knew there was going to be a new structure, but a detailed roadmap hadn’t been developed,” Fischer explained.

Communicating with staff in a sustained and frequent manner was a high priority

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for Fischer from the start. She praised Deputy Minister Ron Sapsford for keeping the lines of communication open with staff and reaching them directly through his tours, face-to-face meetings across the province and his frequent all-staff e-mail messages. “The Deputy Minister has been the guiding light. His vision and commitment have been unwavering,” Fischer said.

She also recognized the commitment that senior leadership made to communicate to their divisions through the phases of change. “This confirmed for staff that the organization was undergoing a transparent process that put a value on keeping them informed.”

The *NEW Directions* newsletter was also created to communicate information on the progress of the transition. Fischer said it helped to make the process a shared experience, as well as to create a corporate memory of the transition.

Building trust and commitment

Susan Fitzpatrick, Executive Director, Negotiations and Accountability Management, Health System Accountability and Performance, recalls how tense things were in her division at the start of its transition and how Fischer adeptly won the trust of many. “She was with us right from the start, helping us through all of the processes,” Fitzpatrick said.

“She really stayed on track with things that were sometimes a hard sell. She understood and respected other people’s points of view. She did a fabulous job for our division.”

Lorraine Deska, Manager, Transition Change Management Team, Corporate and Direct Services, noted that Fischer was also very committed to learning and development programs to foster a cultural shift. Fischer encouraged the design of tools and resources to support staff at all levels in the new way of working at the ministry. “Debbie made sure attention was paid to change management and she was relentless in the need for learning all the way through the organization,” Deska observed. “She understood that without the necessary behaviour changes, all the structural changes could not succeed.”

Deska explained that the manner in which Fischer carried out her role and interacted



Debbie Fischer, former ADM, Transition, delivers a wrap-up presentation at a meeting of the Ministry Management Committee. Fischer said in an interview that the ministry has laid the necessary foundation and has the required tools and committed leadership to continue the momentum of its cultural stewardship transition. Counter clockwise from bottom left: Adalsteinn Brown, ADM, Health System Strategy; Ron Sapsford, Deputy Minister; Greg Hein, Director, Ministry Integration and Coordination, Deputy Minister's Office; Dr. Joshua Tepper, ADM, Health Human Resource Strategy; John McKinley, ADM, Health System Information Management and Investment; Debbie Fischer, former ADM, Transition; and Ruth Hawkins, Executive Lead, Direct and Corporate Services, Corporate and Direct Services.

with the staff was an example of stewardship in action. “She modelled the very behaviours she was trying to embed — team leadership and collaboration. It wasn’t about her transition. She let the people shine who did the work.”

Talented and committed staff made transition a success

The stewardship culture will take time to become fully embedded within the ministry, Fischer said. But she was pleased with the influence of initiatives like the Stewardship in Action Leadership Program, the Stewardship for Everyone Program, as well as the supports aimed specifically at administrative staff. “There is still the need for a learning component because people are at different stages in the process. But so much has already been achieved,” Fischer said.

Sheree Davis, Director of the Health System Strategy Branch, Health System Strategy, said she appreciated Fischer’s focus on supporting leaders within the ministry to champion stewardship. “She

reinforced the concept of training the trainer. She was teaching us to fish as it were — to practice stewardship principles and then transfer this knowledge,” Davis said.

Fischer also did an impeccable job in helping to maintain the momentum of a very complex and long transition, Davis said. “She kept us on track and drove through those milestones. She is a creative problem solver, who never lost sight of the prize — transforming and creating a very different role for the ministry.”

Fischer noted that she was always incredibly impressed by the hard work, talent and commitment of ministry staff that managed to navigate the transition process, while at the same time tackling the ongoing issues facing the health care system. For example, she pointed to the Public Health Division carrying out its transition agenda in the context of managing the outbreak of the H1N1 virus in Ontario. “This ministry is filled with smart, thoughtful people carrying out exceptional work,” said Fischer.

Allison Stuart, Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Public Health, praised Fischer for

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always being able to balance the need for achieving the required deliverables with an understanding of the competing pressures facing the division. “She never lost her focus and she wouldn’t let the rest of us lose ours. But at the same time, her approach was reassuring. She was part of us,” Stuart said.

Fischer said she hopes that the ministry staff is proud of the enormity of the tasks they have accomplished in the past three years. The majority of the ministry’s divisions have successfully undergone the transition process. The ministry has also overseen the divestment of significant entities, like the Ontario Public Health

Laboratories, which was transferred to the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion and the Mental Health Centre Penetanguishene, which was transferred to the hospital sector. “The ministry looks and works very differently and it has taken the hard work of a lot of people to achieve this,” Fischer said.

John McKinley, Assistant Deputy Minister, Health System Information Management and Investment, also said he greatly appreciated Fischer’s hard work over the course of the transition. “She created a very solid process that we could get our teeth into. She was quite willing to say that she didn’t always

have the answers but she would help us to find them,” McKinley said.

“We were very fortunate to have such a seasoned professional working by our side. There were some huge mountains to climb and she helped see us up them and down the other side.”

Deputy Minister Sapsford thanked Fischer for her unfaltering energy and the commitment she brought to the transition process. “Her inspired work brought us a long way on our stewardship journey and her efforts have laid the foundation for the cultural change, which we will continue to build on and foster,” Sapsford said. ■

Sustainment unit will help embed stewardship culture

A new unit is being created to ensure continued focus on implementing and sustaining the ministry’s stewardship organization and culture. “Most transition design activities will wind down by mid-2010,” explained Deputy Minister Ron Sapsford. “It is essential that we continue to build on and sustain our stewardship accomplishments.”

The Sustainment Unit, which will reside within Corporate and Direct Services, will play a key role in ensuring the completion of the implementation phase as well as supporting the sustainment of the stewardship organization, processes and culture.

The unit’s mandate will be to ensure the integrity of and support the implementation of process and organization changes across the ministry. This will ensure that the required level of support and oversight is provided to divisions as they evolve in their stewardship organization. The unit will also be responsible to develop learning programs that support embedding stewardship skills and behaviours within the ministry. It will also build on programs and tools that were developed by the transition team to enhance the new way of carrying out the business of the ministry.

The unit will be fully implemented by April 2010. ■

Corporate and Direct Services

Sustainment Unit Organizational Chart

MANDATE: Ensure the integrity of and support the implementation of process and organization changes across the ministry.

Please note: The number of positions captured in the organizational chart is an estimate only and is based on initial planning assumptions about the work which will be undertaken. As a result of the on-going analysis of the business priorities, the number of positions will be reviewed and approved accordingly.

