

CASHh to continue its policy of free transportation service

By **LISA TALLYN**
Staff Writer

Starting next month, new cancer patients who are driven to and from their appointments courtesy of the Canadian Cancer Society will have to pay a one-time \$100 fee, but that's not the case with Cancer Assistance Services of Halton Hills (CASHh).

The local organization will continue to offer patients free rides to and from their appointments and treatments.

"We have no intention of charging for any of our services," said CASHh executive director Sheila Smith. "These are vulnerable members of our society and don't deserve to have added stress to what they're already going through. We want to make their cancer journey as stress-free as possible."

Canadian Cancer Society drivers sometimes take one, or several patients at a time. CASHh drivers take only one patient at a time so the patients don't have to wait for others and have their immune system possibly compromised.

The fee is considered a necessity said Tanya Nixon, the Society's senior manager of transportation, if the program is going to stay afloat amid growing



SHEILA SMITH

demand and rising costs.

"More people are being diagnosed, the population is aging, people are living longer with cancer," she said. "We always knew we'd start to see an increase in demand."

The Society's volunteer driving program cost it \$6 million last year, the majority of which goes toward paying drivers for their mileage (currently 30 cents per kilometre, but it fluctuates depending on gas prices), vehicle wear-and-tear, and around 10 per cent of their licence and insurance costs.

CASHh pays its drivers 48 cents per kilometre.

"It is very important to be fair with reimbursing them (drivers) with their expenses," said Smith.

The Cancer Society plans to offer a Compassionate Program for those who can't afford the \$100, although Nixon said there is no way to tell at the moment how many people will require it.

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