

Rehabilitation unit focused on improving quality of life

Stories by Sandra Omand
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

Recovering from a stroke or fractured hip has just gotten easier for residents of Oakville and Milton thanks to a new 39-bed rehabilitation unit at the Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital.

On hand last Thursday to officially open the \$2-million facility funded by the provincial government was Elizabeth Witmer, Minister of Health & Long Term Care.

"This is really very positive because in talking to some of the patients today there are individuals who were receiving treatment in Hamilton and Toronto who have now been able to be repatriated and come back to their own community,"

Witmer told a gathering of 80 patients, staff and local dignitaries in the reception area of the new unit.

Previously, residents of Oakville and Milton were forced to drive to Toronto or Hamilton to receive rehabilitation therapy. This was not only inconvenient, it placed additional stresses on patients and family members.

"It is much better for their recovery if people can receive care within their home community," said Mayor Anne Mulvale.

With the addition of the new third floor unit, patients go from the acute care stage to in-patient rehabilitation and on to the out-patient stage without ever leaving Oakville.

"It is a continuum of care for our

patients in our community and it is very supportive of family and the community at large," said Pauline Mihok, Patient Care Manager of the Rehabilitation Unit and Step Up Program.

While the need for a rehabilitation facility in Halton has been evident for sometime, it was not until 1998 that support was received for the program through the Health Services Restructuring Commission.

Witmer said funding for the new unit follows the government's objective under the restructuring process to strengthen the health system.

"What we've been talking about in the government is bringing the services closer to home and ensuring that the services delivered respond to the specific

needs of the people in the province," said Witmer.

Witmer credited Oakville MPP with being a "strong advocate" for health care funding in his constituency.

Afterwards, Carr admitted to being outspoken on health care issues and pushing for funding in this area.

"There have been major changes in the health structure right across the province and what I've been doing is working to ensure that during that process we have the funds available to provide the various services for the people of Oakville," said Carr.

Services for people like Jean Caine who participated in the unusual opening ceremony with Witmer and hospital staff. Rather than have the traditional ribbon cutting ceremony Mihok had participants place a decorated stone representing one of the 14 steps on the road to independence in a miniature rock garden to mark

the grand opening.

Caine, currently an out-patient in the Step Up Program, suffered a stroke three months ago and said she chose to place the stone entitled "dressing" because relearning that skill meant a lot to her.

Dr. Greg Thomson, the Medical Program Leader, called the Rehabilitation Program that played such a large role in Caine's recovery "one of the best around" because of its state-of-the-art facilities and the multidisciplinary team running it.

The team is comprised of nurses, physicians, social workers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, discharge planners and recreation therapists all working in concert with one another.

Another \$2 million will be added to next year's base budget to bring the total amount in funding for the new Unit to \$4 million.

Stroke victim thankful for services

It comes without warning and leaves devastation in its wake. It is called a stroke and Jean Caine had one early in June while sitting in an armchair in her southeast Oakville home late one afternoon.

Unable to stand or move her left arm, and a with prickly sensation running along the side of her face, she immediately telephoned her family for help.

Caine, who will only admit to never seeing 70 again, spent four days in the intensive care unit of the Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital followed by three months in the rehabilitation unit.

"It was a terrible shock because I'm a business woman who went to work every day and to suddenly not be able to do for myself was a terribly traumatic experience," said Caine, owner of CHWO Radio.

Two weeks ago she was discharged from the new \$2-million provincially-funded 39-bed Rehabilitation program at OTMH that was officially opened last week. Now Caine is an out-patient in the Step Up program that continues on where the in-patient Rehabilitation program left off.

Caine said without the Rehabilitation program and the excellent care she received from the rehab staff she would not have gotten better.

"I'm up on my feet walking around, when I never thought I would be, and I'm back in my own home, which I never thought I would be," said Caine. She still relies on a wheel chair or a walker much of the time to get around, but insists this is only temporary.

Undergoing rehabilitation therapy is something Caine finds "very ironic" since she has devoted her life as a volunteer for rehabilitation services.

She and her late husband, Howard, became acquainted with rehab when their daughter, Pamela Caine-Stokes, was confined to a wheel-chair after contracting polio as a young child in 1949.

They were active in rehabilitation issues for so many years the March of Dimes honoured them three years ago by naming their building at the corner of Robinson and Trafalgar after the Caines (it is called the Jean & Howard Caine Centre). The apartment building is specially designed so disabled people can live independently.

Now Caine has become the unofficial spokesperson for the hospital's new Rehabilitation Unit and is fiercely supportive of the program.

"It is important because it is not just for stroke victims

or the elderly, but for children or anyone who needs rehabilitation to get their limbs functioning again and to get back into the rhythm of their lives," said Caine, who was unable to lift her arm to comb her own hair when she was first admitted.

The 39-bed Unit and out-patient Step-Up Program occupy the third floor of the hospital known as Three West. Patients stay an average of 28 days in the Rehabilitation Unit which is more home-like than other clinical areas of the hospital.

In addition to many common areas, the unit contains a dining room where patients are encouraged to take their meals and an "Independent Living Center"(ILC) for assessing patient's independence.

The ILC, the last stop before discharge, looks like an apartment with its separate kitchen and cozy sitting area. Its purpose is to simulate situations patients would experience at home like getting on and off a sofa, in and out of a regular bed and preparing a meal on their own in the fully equipped kitchen.

"Patients are taught the simplest things in life here because when you lose them they become the most important thing," said Patient Care Manager Pauline Mihok.

Called "functional independence," patients learn how to wash, dress, void, feed, walk - all activities of daily living that we normally do without thinking - by themselves.

This is accomplished through a team approach that encompasses nurses, physicians, physiotherapists, social workers, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, discharge planners, dietitians, respiration therapists and recreational therapists.

"The beauty of a unit like this is it can be totally coordinated so the people who are working to help you dress are working with the people who are building your strength up etc.," said Caine.

Caine's son Michael, who visited his mother up to four times a day, also praised the unit. He was especially impressed with the staff.

"They became like family members. They learned about us and we learned about them and that meant a great deal because that isn't something you get from a union contract or from government funding," said Michael Caine, President & General Manager of CHWO Radio. "This is something that comes from the heart and we are very blessed in Oakville with the staff because they care."

Spill into lake continues to be investigated

(Continued from page 1)

paint was dumped shortly before the pedestrians on the lakeside walkway first noticed the spill. At its worst, he said, the paint spread out into the lake to form a slick roughly seven yards deep and

about 150 yards long. The rocks beneath the sewer outlet were also covered in paint.

Unlike sanitary sewers, materials that find their way into storm sewers are not treated, but are simply discharged into the lake.

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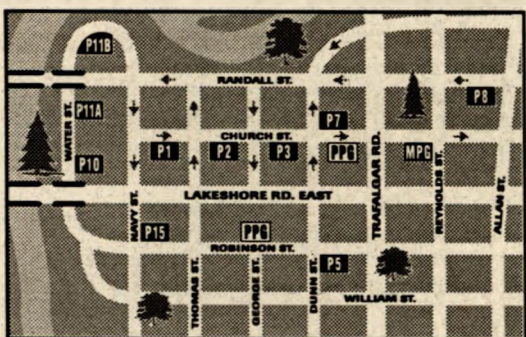
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