



DOUG GALT



LOU RINALDI



MURRAY WEPPLER



DERRICK KELLY

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Cut the red tape and reduce tuition to attract doctors

BY PEG McCARTHY
STAFF WRITER

Along with education, one of the hot election topics is health care - not only reliable health care, but locally, how the current shortage of medical doctors can be solved.

With the new Northumberland Hills Hospital poised to open Oct. 22, incumbent MPP Dr. Doug Galt is convinced more doctors will be attracted to the area.

"The new hospital is the biggest thing we can do," says Dr. Galt, adding doctors will have the use of the latest technological equipment.

"Increased training opportunities, 30-per cent more spaces for both physicians and nurses, will be added to institutions," says the Tory candidate in the provincial election, noting there will be a new school between Sudbury and Thunder Bay that will train medical professionals.

Dr. Galt says the Province will pay the tuition for medical students who will either go into family practice or work in under-served areas, and 600 foreign-trained physicians will also be eligible for Ontario accreditation.

Most areas of Northumberland have been deemed as under served by the province, which currently means they are eligible for some financial and marketing assistance in attracting new doctors.

Dr. Galt says he understood medical standards for maximum



waiting times for medical conditions involving heart by-pass surgery, cancer treatments and joint replacement were currently being met.

Secured funding for an MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) machine at the Northumberland Hills Hospital is also a goal for the MPP, as well as more funding for ambulance services to extend service hours for the rural areas of the county.

Liberal candidate Lou Rinaldi said his interpretation of reliable health care involves adequate funding for hospitals that would shorten waiting times. He says the Liberals would use the money clawed back from corporations and from tax incentives for those who send their children to private schools, for health care needs, as well as education.

The doctor shortage problem is not simple, says the Liberal candidate, but he believes individual communities should get involved to identify their own needs and how they could be addressed. Liberal leader Dalton McGuinty has said since 1995, the number of communities with doctor shortages has doubled,

and the number of family doctors needed has risen from 83 to 569.

A press release from the Liberal headquarters states the Northumberland area is short five physicians, which means approximately 8,000 residents do not have a family doctor.

"In Brighton, folks are building a health care centre and have attracted a new doctor, even before the walls are up," he says, just by providing an attractive environment for a doctor. "The climate is based on the needs of the community."

Mr. Rinaldi said the Liberals would increase university positions for physicians by 15 per cent, and also reduce the red tape for foreign doctors who would like to practice in Ontario.

The Liberals have also committed to the creation of 150 family health teams to provide front-line health care, and improve the incentives to doctors who practice in under serviced areas.

New Democratic Party candidate Murray Wepler disputes some of the statements made by the Tories, noting waiting times for surgeries are long and arduous for patients.

The main thrust of the NDP platform for health care is that it remains public, says Mr. Wepler. "We have to stop the privatization of hospitals and MRI clinics, that take money out of the system. Profit deprives."

Health care and hospitals must be adequately funded, says

the NDP candidate. "Every hospital is running a deficit. The reality is, tax cuts to wealthy people means there are patients on waiting list who are paying."

And those waiting lists are obscene, he adds, noting he recently heard from a local taxpayer whose doctor has been fighting to have a surgery scheduled for him for the past six months.

"The more important local issue is doctors - Brighton is trying to set up a clinic and so far has only attracted one doctor.

"Both the PCs and the Liberals have blocked the employment of well-trained foreign doctors," says Mr. Wepler. "We could solve this shortage overnight if we recognized doctors from other countries. It's an easy solution and it wouldn't cost a thing."

Along with other areas of education, Mr. Wepler says the funding issues can easily be solved, by increasing income tax for those who make over \$100,000 annually.

Green Party candidate Derrick Kelly says doctors should be paid a set salary and not a fee.

"We have an aging population which creates more illness. Getting more general practitioners is just a Band-Aid solution. We need to create a healthy environment where people won't get sick. None of the other parties talk about that." He said the Green Party would have OHIP cover alternative medicines as well as dentists, chiropractors and herbologists.

