

## Opinion

## Georgetown hospital building healthy relationship

Judging from the ongoing publicity campaign by Georgetown and District Memorial Hospital in recognition of its 30th anniversary this year, it's obvious the hospital is attempting to build a healthy relationship between itself and the community.

For any relationship to be sound, there must first be mutual respect - An understanding the hospital has finally realized. This assertion might appear to be overly harsh, since its made by someone who has never worked at the hospital and only been involved in the Halton Hills community for the past two years.

Granted I didn't know much about the hospital and its relationship with the community before the spring of 1989, but I do have an idea of the relationship since then and how it has progressed.

To put it bluntly, until last fall the hospital came across as paranoid. Hospital administrators refused to discuss public anything controversial or that could be construed that way.

For example, early last year I approached the hospital on two separate occasions to write articles, one on the future of health care in Halton Hills and the other on the life of a nurse. Both times I was requested to submit the articles to the hospital for review before they went to press. It's no wonder few news items about the hospital were ever initiated by the local press. Most coverage centred around photos of cheque donations.

I realize the hospital cannot be as open as other public institutions since it deals with the health problems of individuals, but neither of the subjects I wanted to write a story on involved an individual's health problems.

The theme running through the story I wrote on health care in the future was the hospital is trying to provide as much care in the home as possible. In the second story the message was nursing is a demanding profession that sometimes goes unappreciated.

Similar types of stories appeared in the Toronto and other media at the same time I wrote



Ben's Banter  
by  
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my stories. I wasn't saying anything new other than providing a local angle.

I can't speak for other people but I have difficulty respecting an institution that doesn't present both sides of a story.

Since last December, there is a new openness at the hospital. The man responsible for this openness is John Oliver, who was announced as the hospital's new Executive Director last December.

Early into his tenure I interviewed him about the hospital

and potential funding it was to receive from Halton Region. He answered all my questions honestly and openly. The issue of reading my article before it went to press, never arose.

A more current example concerns the article appearing in today's paper about the contract the Georgetown Hospital nurses recently signed.

I telephone Mr. Oliver last Thursday to discuss the agreement but he was unavailable at the time. I left a message with his secretary for him to call me and as usual she asked what it was regarding. Since I told the secretary it was about the contract, an issue looked upon by many as controversial, I didn't expect my call to be returned soon. However, Mr. Oliver returned my call that same day and openly discussed the terms of the contract. He even went as far as to say the hospital may not be able to maintain, into the future, the budgetary surplus expected at the end of this fiscal year.

This statement may not appear risqué to the general public, since

all institutions are going through tough times. However, it was this kind of information that was not readily available at the hospital before Mr. Oliver arrived on the scene.

This openness is also being practiced by the hospital's board of directors, or least its chairman, Graeme Goebelle.

At a recent hospital board of directors meeting one of the items appearing on the public portion of the agenda was moved to the "in camera" portion, for no apparent reason.

An in camera session means members of the public and the press can't be in attendance. Frustrated with this action I asked why, only to be told because someone wanted it that way.

But Mr. Goebelle took it upon himself to call me the next day and provide an explanation.

The action initially took me by surprise but after thinking about it for a while in context with recent other dealings with the hospital, I realized it was another example of a new and healthy hospital practice - true openness.

## The coming months will be crucial for Chretien

By STEWART MacLEOD  
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OTTAWA - To say merely that the next couple of months will be crucial for Liberal Leader Jean Chretien would be colossal understatement.

He won't simply be watched. He'll be dissected.

After being out of commission since Feb. 26, when a benign tumor was removed from his lung, the 57-year-old party leader is returning to Parliament with all sorts of questions swirling over his head. In many ways, this return is more difficult than last year's when, as the newly crowned Liberal chief, he came back to a Parliament he had left five years earlier.

Had the last nine months been easier and more successful for the so-called Shawinigan street-fighter, there wouldn't be these disconcerting questions nagging him today. But this period hasn't been an unqualified success for Mr. Chretien as he struggled to regain his footing in Parliament while trying to give new drive and direction to a drifting party.

Matters were not helped by an apparent policy flip-flop on Canada's involvement in the Gulf War. And there have been other problems, not the least of which is the leader's difficulty in re-establishing the folksy, down-to-earth speaking style that had made him so popular as a cabinet minister.

Mr. Chretien was still struggling with his style when he was flattened by that tumor.

## GOOD SHOW

But not only does he now have to continue re-establishing himself in this respect, the leader has a new and more difficult act to follow. While he was in hospital and then recuperating in Florida, the party was headed by Sheila Copps, who had built a large following when she ran against Mr. Chretien for the leadership last June.

Under her, the Liberal parliamentary caucus came up with a sharp, crisp performance. She has been leading off the daily Commons question period in a more surefooted manner than Mr. Chretien had and her gritty style seemed to inspire the troops around her.

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by  
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There were no flip-flops, no signs of indecision.

In other words, a difficult performance for a full-time leader to follow.

This, of course, is coupled with the inevitable questions about Mr. Chretien's health. Whenever a politician undergoes surgery, and particularly if a tumor is involved, everybody is left wondering whether they've been given an accurate diagnosis.

And even though there is no reason to doubt Mr. Chretien's own self-assessment of his good

health, he will nonetheless be under the watchful eye of every amateur doctor - which includes just about everyone - in the country.

Not only his health will be watched, but his performance, along with the performance of his 83-member caucus.

Then there are the opinion polls. After trailing the New Democrats for months, the Liberals suddenly shot into the lead last month - while Mr. Chretien was away. Could his absence be a factor?

## NOSNIPING

It should be said here that caucus seems solidly behind Mr. Chretien and there have been no serious rumblings of discontent. Some MPs still question his wisdom in choosing to "lie low" last summer, after becoming leader, but that's minor.

And so is the criticism about his speaking style and the fact that he often seems to have more difficulty with English now than he did 10 years ago. "You're bound to lose your edge when you're off the political platform for five years," says one colleague. "He's beginning to hit his stride

again now."

If any Liberal MP began sniping at the leader, there would be an angry Sheila Copps to deal with. As the party's deputy leader, she's a staunch Chretien supporter, who'll have no truck or trade with leader killers. "Anyone who talks about pushing people aside hasn't learned the lessons of what we went through between 1984 and 1988," she says.

This was the period when John Turner spent half the time pulling knives from his back.

One problem Mr. Chretien might have to deal with, however, is the often strained relationship between some of his MPs and advisors in his own office. These advisers - particularly principle secretary Eddie Goldenberg - are often blamed for the leader's slow start and the apparent change in his style. "If he'll just be himself," says an MP, "he'll be fine."

Over the next few months, he'll be carefully scrutinized, not only to see whether he's fine but to see whether the party is as fine as it appeared under his deputy. Mr. Chretien has his work cut out.

## Business leaders like trilateral trade treaty idea

OTTAWA - There's already some agreement on a proposed free-trade deal among Canada, Mexico and the United States.

Business bosses in all three countries like the idea of a trilateral trade treaty; labor leaders don't.

The reasons are clear. Businesses see expanded sales, reduced costs and higher profits. Canadian and American unions expect jobs will be lost to low-paid Mexican workers, and Mexican labor chiefs fear exploitation of their members.

These potentially deal-wrecking concerns might be soothed, but so far there's little indication the governments involved are willing to embrace the solution.

It's unfortunate that, with all the recent boosterism about setting up a North American trade area - which would be an even larger economic entity than the 12-nation European Community - short shrift has been given to a social charter that could raise the deplorable living and working standards of Mexican employees.

The European charter, adopted just over a year ago, affirms rights of workers in all member countries to fair pay; paid leave; social benefits; union membership; job training; health and

safe working conditions, and other protections.

Such rights, it appears, are not to be the lot of Mexicans, who reputedly earn as little as 60 cents an hour in maquiladora sweatshops.

## REJECTS IDEA

Trade Minister John Crosbie, announcing Canada's participation in the trade talks last week, poured cold water on the idea of a charter.

"We don't intend to dictate to Mexico the social, cultural or labor policies they should adopt," Crosbie said, although nothing had been said about "dictating."

Funny! When low-wage Greeks, Portuguese and Spaniards were told of a European charter, there was no sign of them rushing to the barricades to defend their God-given right to less pay or poorer working conditions than those bullying Germans, French and British.

Believe it or not, a social charter would be welcomed by many Mexican labor leaders. Indeed, Jorge Castenada, one of the critics of the trade policy of Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, has welcomed Canada's role in the talks. Canada would help the effort for a social charter, he suggested.

Judging by Crosbie's remarks,

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Castenada thinks more of Canadians than we deserve and he will be sadly disappointed.

So, too, will Canadian labor leaders like James McCambly, president of the Canadian Federation of Labor, who has promoted the idea as a benefit to workers in all three countries.

A social or labor charter could make the idea of North American free trade more palatable to workers who fear loss of jobs. This is not a concern to be casually brushed off.

## FEAR LOST JOBS

Last summer, Investment Canada issued a report noting that Canadian workers worry about losing jobs to a potential partner "portrayed as having sub-standard labor conditions."

This fear is a challenge for proponents of a deal, the federal agency said, because it's easy to point out where jobs are likely to be lost - for example, in auto parts and textile industries.

"Unfortunately, it is very difficult for economists and industry experts to state, with any degree of confidence, where job opportunities will arise." This identical dilemma has arisen with the Canada-U.S. pact.

Many politicians and labor leaders in the U.S. are worried, too. The American Federation of Labor, which bases its arguments against a deal on the same fears as Canadian labor, hopes to rally enough senators to kill the trade initiative this spring, before it gets off the ground.

There's a variety of reasons given for Canada's venture into Mexican free trade.

It would be humanitarian, one argument goes, to help Mexican workers and consumers. True, if they are not exploited by low wages. Higher incomes and social benefits would help raise their living standards.

Mexico's 85 million people represent an expanding market for made-in-Canada goods, a second proposition runs. Indeed - if they are wealthy enough to buy our products. They must have the money to be good consumers.

A social charter would go a long way to underpin both these reasons.

## Write us a letter!

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All letters must be signed. Please include your address and telephone number for verification.

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