

Tense times looming at Georgetown hospital

By Oksana Buhel

Georgetown and District Memorial Hospital board members are anxiously awaiting provincial correspondence to determine how difficult adjustments will be to obligatory OHA (Ontario Hospital Association) and OMA (Ontario Medical Association) social contract requirements.

"Rae days," as Dr. Don Trant, chief of staff at GDMH, refers to the social contract days, were not supposed to affect the hospital staff because of expected funding from the Ministry of Health for pay equity.

This changed Tuesday when he was notified by GDMH executive director, John Oliver, that changes may be forthcoming.

Trant insisted emergency services at the hospital will not be completely suspended. He explained two doctors would be constantly available for emergency surgery, although less serious operations would not be scheduled for those days. The same procedure would be applied to the X-ray department, where



Dr. Alex Furness

a technician would be on call only for the most serious situations.

"We already do this over the Christmas season," Trant said.

He insisted the situation in Toronto, where various hospitals are reported to be closing their emergency services, would not be mirrored in Georgetown. "First of all, those hospitals are a stone's throw away from each other so what can't be done at one hospital can be done at one nearby," Trant pointed out. "And second, I can't imagine closing our emergency services - it would put our

patients at a considerable risk."

Oliver agreed, saying there was "no foreseeable need to close this year."

Trant added that even if hospital staff is required to take time off - a skeletal staff would be left at the hospital to take care of patients.

If emergency services at GDMH have to close down, patients will have to go to the nearest hospital - Credit Valley Hospital in Mississauga - a 20-minute drive, not accounting for traffic.

Accommodating required time off for hospital staff members is not the only problem the hospital faces.

OMA elected council decided last Saturday that doctors must take nine social contract days a year - without pay -, which would decrease government payments to physicians by \$130 million over three years.

Oliver announced Tuesday he had not yet been advised by Dr. Alex Furness, president of the medical staff and of the Georgetown chapter of the OMA, which physician

services will be cut.

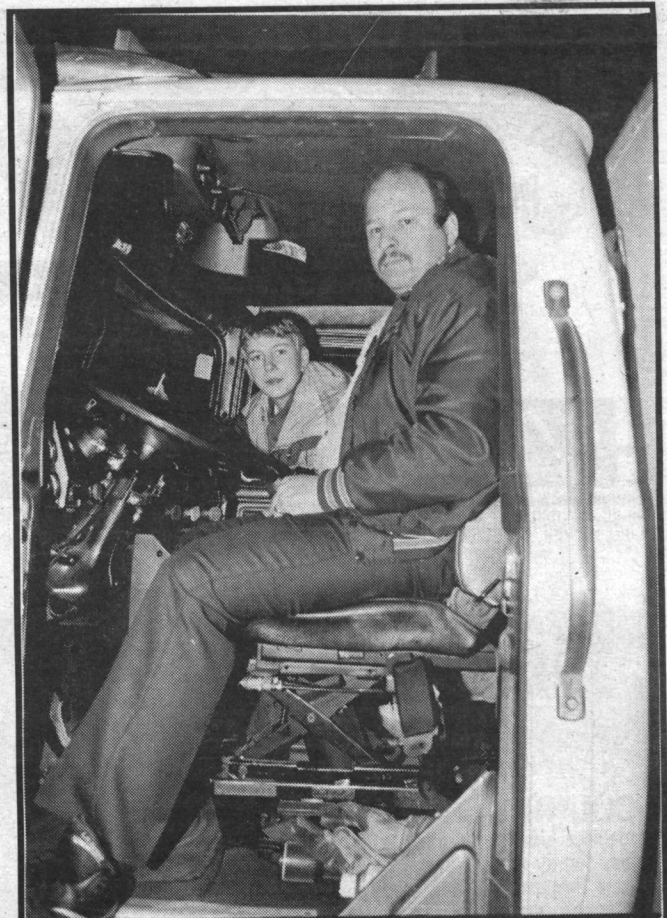
During the nine days, doctors' offices will be closed and doctors will only be available for emergency services. These same nine days will apply to all Ontario doctors.

Trant said he hoped that if hospital staff must take time off, it can be coordinated with the nine days, but Furness did not believe it would be possible.

"OHA usually takes Mondays or Fridays off," he pointed out, "but we don't have the liberty to pick our days. One week it may be Monday, the next week it could be some other day."

Negotiations with the hospital board, regarding which days, if any, will be taken off by hospital staff, have not yet begun, but Oliver said they will begin in the next few weeks.

"If the Ministry decides to give us the promised funds, we'll make a decision accordingly," Oliver said. "If the Ministry does not respond in the next few weeks, we'll also have to make a decision."



Ready to roll

Awake and anxious to go, Dale Holman and HHTW reporter Oksana Buhel depart on their 14-hour trek to Toledo, Ohio. For the full story, please turn to page 12. photo by Simon Wilson/HHTW

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David Sands of the Georgetown District High School senior Rebels boys volleyball team goes up for a spike Tuesday at Sheridan College against M.M. Robinson in the Halton championship final, won handily by the Rebels. For the story on the championship win, please turn to page 25. photo by Mike Zrostek/HHTW

Halton Region tightens belt

By Johanna Powell
Special to HHTW

Halton region is planning to hold the line on its budget into the next century.

A forecast released last week shows the region does not plan to raise the mill rate on its portion of the property tax bill in 1994 or 1995. Increases of about one to two per cent are forecast for the years 1996 to 2003.

Oakville and regional councillor Fred Oliver, who sits on the regional budget committee, said he would like to see a decrease in the mill rate next year, but he would "settle" for a zero per cent increase.

However, the rates charged for water and wastewater will be going up next year by 2.7 per cent. That's an increase of about \$10 for a typical Halton household and it will show up on next year's utility

bills.

John Burke, chief administrative officer for Halton region, said a fundamental goal for the region is to keep the mill rate increase at or below the rate of inflation.

Property taxes, which are based on the mill rate, pay for services such as the regional health and social services department, the regional planning department and the police. The finance department says the region needs to collect \$57.9 million in property taxes.

No layoffs are anticipated, although staff numbers will be reduced by 80 through attrition.

In its forecast, Halton's finance department said there are a number of pressures on the regional budget, including a slow economic recovery, which has kept welfare costs, paid par-

tially by the region, significantly higher than in 1992.

Starting in the 1993-94 period, the region also has to pay a new provincial sales tax on insurance and has to meet the requirements of the provincial expenditure control plan, or ECP.

Burke renewed warnings that the provincial government may be considering a second expenditure control plan, since the province is expected to overshoot its forecast deficit of \$9.5 billion.

"There's a strong possibility they'll come back to the well," he said. Regional officials believe the province views municipal governments, which have not rung up the huge debts seen at provincial and federal levels, as rich resources.

All of the budget recommendations will have to be approved by council.

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and all through the House ...



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