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MOORE'S THE SUIT PEOPLE

Halton Region drumming up cash for the mentally ill

By BRAD REAUME

The Champion

Halton needs an additional \$616,000 to cover a program designed to identify and manage serious mental illness among the elderly.

Currently the source of these funds has not been identified but Halton is moving forward in its planning to provide these services to the best of its ability.

Recently various service providers and interested groups across Halton met to work out the plan to improve services. According to Halton Medical Officer of Health Dr. Bob Nosal, the agencies came to a surprisingly quick agreement on the issue and resulting program.

Halton recently received \$300,000 from the provincial government for the improvement of these types of services, however a study suggested the need for \$916,000 on top of the \$835,000 currently spent, leaving a \$616,000 shortfall.

Dr. Nosal said approximately half of the 1,000 people currently in need of help are being dealt with by other health care providers, in most cases their family doctors. He said the new program should help to standardize treatment and service levels.

Members of Halton's health and social services committee agreed to forward the plan to Ministry of Health officials and put the issue of more funding on the agenda at the next meeting between Halton mayors and local MPPs.

The committee agreed to pass a bylaw so Halton will have an agreement with various providers of

mental health services to the elderly. The lead agency for the new approach will be the Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital, which operates an outreach service in Halton. The new system should allow the various agencies to reduce their administration, which will free up money to be spent on front line help.

According to Dr. Nosal, it is estimated that about 25 per cent of Halton's 39,600 population older than 65 years have some mental health need. Halton's elderly population will grow significantly in the next decade. In addition 60 to 80 per cent of patients admitted to long term care have a mental health need.

However, according to provincial estimates only 2.5 per cent of people over 65 years of age need and may benefit from mental health services.

Currently about \$835,000 is spent on mental health services for the elderly through local hospitals, the North Halton Mental Health Clinic and the Community Care Access Centre.

The new system is based on putting much of the available funding into early assessment and required intervention in the early stages after an individual has been identified as requiring help. After that monitoring of clients would take few resources because they would be referred back to other health care providers such as family doctors.

"We are making prudent changes to our framework," said Oakville Mayor Ann Mulvale. "This shows what needs to be done. It puts our resources into positive deployment rather than having us simply handle crisis situations."

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