

Report backs the original decision to close baby ward

By IRENE GENTLE
The Champion

An independent review has determined that Halton Healthcare Services did the right thing in temporarily closing down the maternity ward at Milton District Hospital.

The review was undertaken by Dr. Ken Milne, chair of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Western Ontario and vice-president of the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

"The maintaining of an obstetrical program without the services of an on-site consultant obstetrician-gynecologist would in my opinion not be a sustainable program," Dr. Milne wrote in his report.

In order to re-open the ward, a full-time obstetrician should be on board at the hospital, he added.

Further, he suggested that one or two family physicians with an additional year of obstetrics training be recruited to round out care in Milton.

Asked if he felt the report backed up the decision by Halton Healthcare to shut the doors to the ward, chief of staff Dr. Lorne Martin replied "It sure does."

The temporary closure of the maternity ward last November led to some consternation in the community, said Dr. Martin.

"There was a lot of anxiety, absolutely. That's to be expected with the loss of a service. The recommendations contained in the report are very positive and support the actions taken to date."

Dr. Martin contacted Dr. Milne last December at the request of the Halton Healthcare board.

Halton Healthcare runs the amalgamated Oakville Trafalgar Memorial and Milton District hospitals.

At that time, the hospital had closed its maternity ward after the previous full-time obstetrician, Dr. Sushil Suppal, opted not to renew his contract.

The review by Dr. Milne was issued in February and released to the media last week.

That release comes on the heels of a recent

announcement that a new obstetrician-gynecologist has been hired for Milton District.

Dr. Sandeep (Sandy) Sharma will begin full-time practice at Milton District in October, effectively re-opening the maternity ward.

In the meantime, Milton women will continue to receive care at hospitals in Oakville and Burlington.

Hiring a full-time obstetrician brings Milton one step closer to the ideal obstetrical service, said Dr. Martin.

Recruiting underway

Preferably, Milton would have two full-time obstetricians working in town, he said. They would be complemented by family doctors also practicing obstetrics.

Recruitment efforts are already underway to bring family doctors with obstetrics training into town, said Dr. Martin.

"There are ads in the all major journals," he confirmed. "We've had some interest. Candidates are coming out and seeing the town."

Though there are family doctors with an interest in obstetrics in Milton, there is no way of knowing how many will practice in that field once the maternity ward reopens, said Dr. Martin.

"It's a bit uncertain at this time. There will be some but we don't know how many. We're really going to have to see when the ward opens."

Active recruitment for a second full-time obstetrician will likely be held off for a few years, said Dr. Martin.

According to a Halton Healthcare report dated last October, expected population growth in Milton will likely create a need for a second obstetrician by 2004.

That report estimated that 490 babies will be delivered in Milton in 2000.

With population growth factored in, that figure is expected to increase to 580 by 2004.

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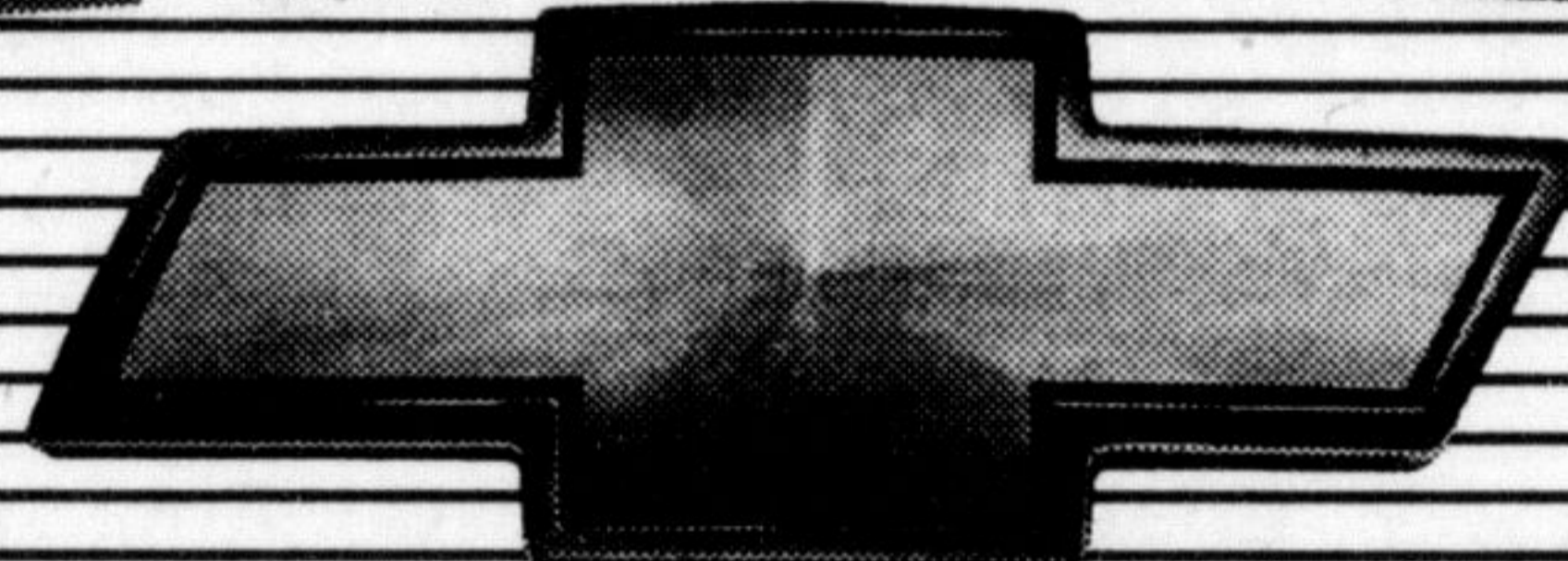
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