

Specialist shortage big problem

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July, after one anesthetist fell ill and another resigned.

And the two remaining doctors can't possibly keep up with the demand, said Dr. King.

"We have two guys and that's why we don't have 24-hour coverage," said Dr. King. "You're asking someone to be on call 24-hours-a-day, seven days a week."

Since the shortage began, two surgeries have had to be rerouted to Oakville due to a lack of manpower at the Milton site, said Dr. King.

Ironically, MDH lost one anesthetist in the spring because he felt there wasn't enough work to go around at the time.

"He wasn't busy since we had lost obstetrics," said Dr. King. "There was a real slowdown in the

operating room."

But demand has increased dramatically since that unit re-opened October 4. And added services at the hospital including plastic and orthopedic surgery have dramatically inflated the need for anesthetists.

Looking to other Halton hospitals has not been of help since, said Dr. King. "They are really busy, too."

To address the severe shortage, a headhunt has been launched by the Niagara-based medical recruitment company MedFall Inc.

MedFall is the company that helped bring obstetrician Dr. Sandy Sharma to MDH.

But Medfall may have its work cut out for it because anesthetists are in short supply all across the

province, said Dr. King.

And the country. There are about 2,200 anaesthetists in Canada, which is almost 200 too few, it's estimated.

Cuts to the GP anesthesia program may be a factor.

But Dr. King is at a loss to explain why specialists are also scarce.

It is possible that Milton's ill anesthetist could be back in the saddle at least on a part-time basis in the near future, she said.

But another body is still needed. "The ideal would be to find a GP who wants to do anesthesia part-time and set up a practice to do obstetrics," said Dr. King.

"But probably that body doesn't exist."

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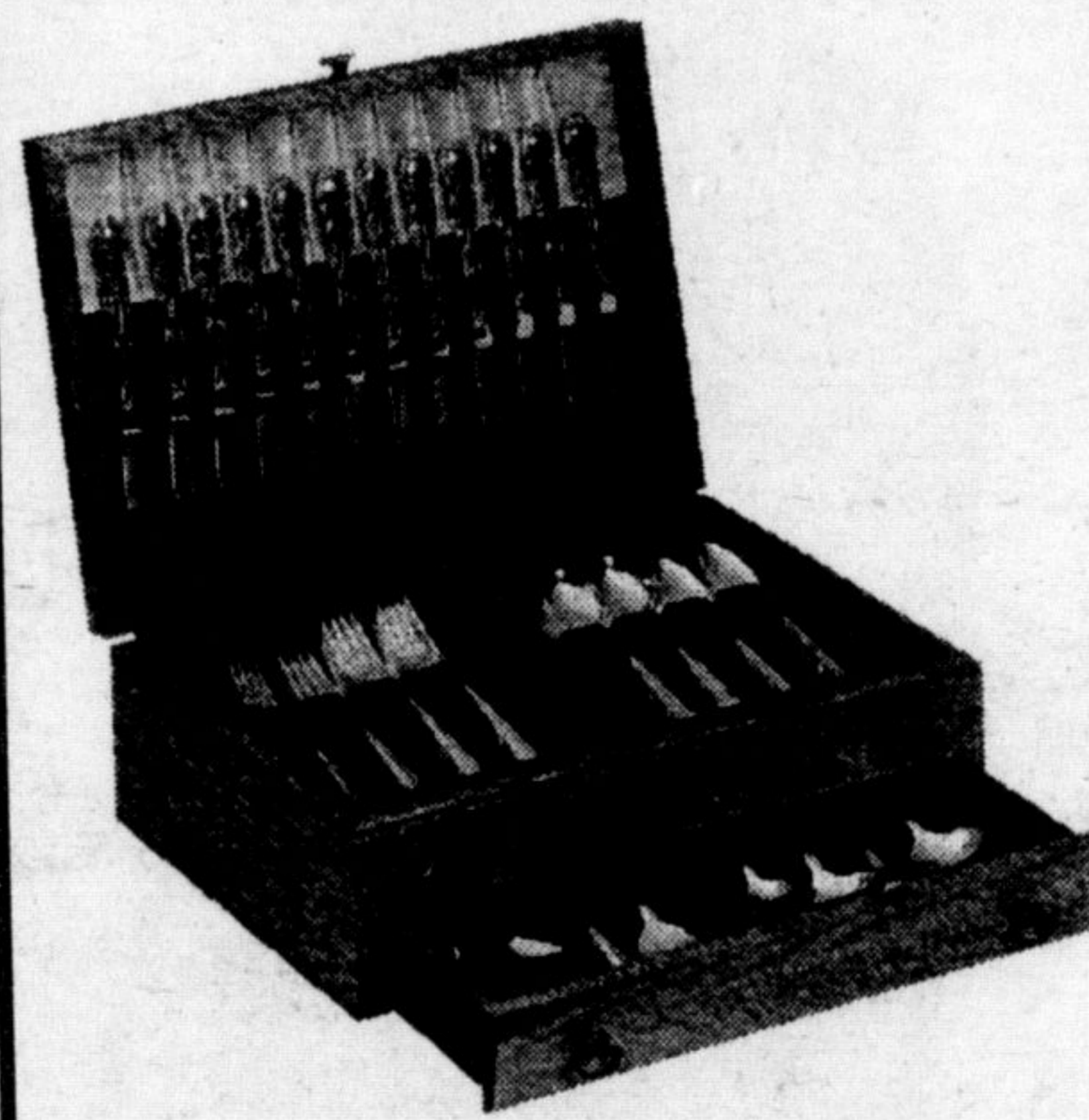
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