

# Maternity ward re-open after 11-month closure

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position of being a patient in his own specialty.

"I tried to keep my mouth shut," he said. "It is always difficult on the other side."

In high school, Dr. Sharma dreamed of becoming a firefighter or police officer. He was a member of his high school rifle club.

But somewhere along the way he decided that sciences suited him better.

And he threw away his guns.

"I won't own a gun. I will never own a gun," he said. "I don't think there is a need to in Canada."

He studied pre-med. at the University of Toronto, then medicine at University of Western Ontario.

He was a resident in virtually every Toronto hospital.

And he has the distinction of having delivered a baby during a fire on the labour floor of Toronto General Hospital.

While it wasn't exactly a case of flames licking at his lab coat as he worked, smoke was leaking into the room and an evacuation order was in effect.

"I had a woman who had an epidural and couldn't walk," he recalled.

His response was to hoist her on his back in hopes of transporting her to the emergency department.

Trouble is, that was so far away from the labour floor that they didn't make it.

He ended up delivering the baby in the hospital post office.

And when he delivers his first baby in Milton, the newborn will have the ironic distinction of being the hospital's 1999 New Year's baby.

The maternity ward has been shut down since last November, when the previous on-site obstetrician/gynecologist Dr. Sushil Suppal opted not to renew his contract.

In the past, Milton's sole on-call obstetrician has been supported by several family doctors with an interest in delivering babies.

But they pulled out of the specialty when the maternity ward closed and so far, they haven't come back.

"Right up until now most of them are referring patients to me," said Dr. Sharma.

But in the future, that will likely change.

If it does, pre-natal care would largely be done by a family physician until about six weeks before

birth. Then the patient would be transferred to the primary care of Dr. Sharma.

Prior to arriving in Milton, Dr. Sharma spent a year working in Cleveland, Ohio, where he was on call every day save for two weekends per month.

That's perhaps why his current schedule doesn't seem as daunting as it might to others.

"It is very similar in terms of on-call expectations," said Dr. Sharma.

"The difference here is I'm the only person."

But when the population merits it — which is projected to be in about four years — a second obstetrician will be recruited, said Ms McDonell.

And despite a nation-wide physician shortage, that search is expected to be relatively hassle-free.

"My guess is it would be easier to attract a second obstetrician," she said.

In the meantime, Milton's size suits Dr. Sharma's aims.

"I want to be a good general obstetrician," he said. "I want to be able to offer as many services as possible."

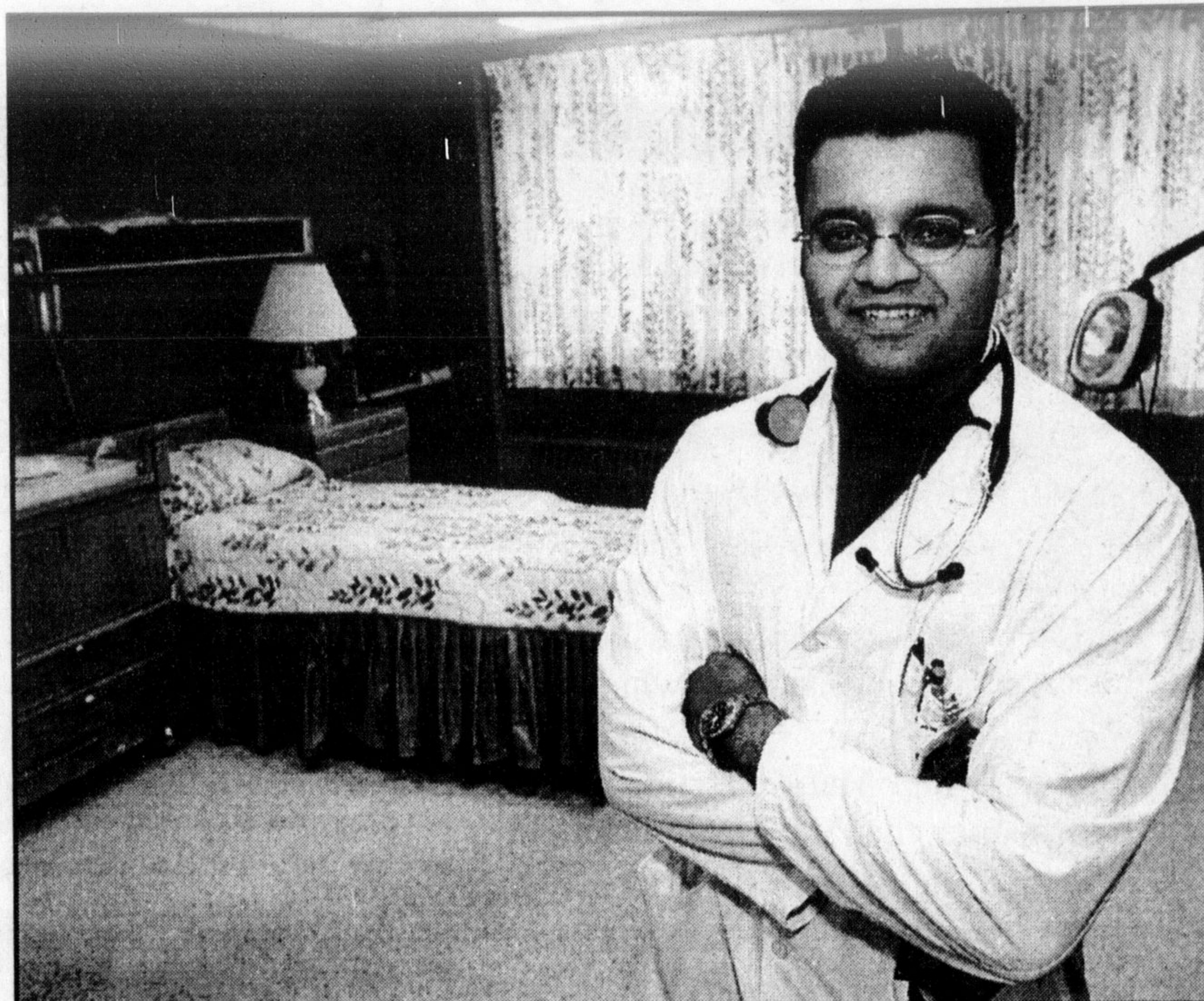


Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Milton District Hospital's maternity ward is now officially re-opened thanks to the arrival of obstetrician/gynecologist Dr. Sandy Sharma. The birthing room he stands in hasn't been used since the ward shut down last November.

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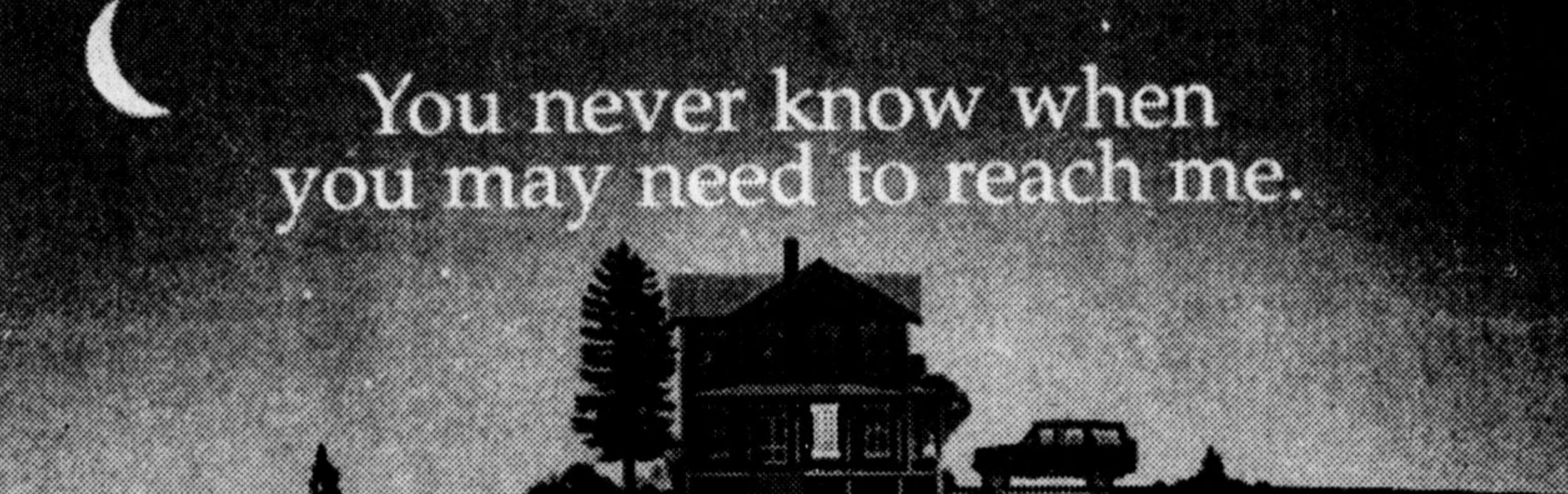
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