



# Champion COMMUNITY Page

## National Nursing Week

# Celebrating those on front lines of healthcare

By IRENE GENTLE  
The Champion

It's a bright, sultry spring morning and inside a well-kept Milton home sit two women on the front lines of healthcare.

Heather Cass-Kerr is a full-time nurse for the Victorian Order of Nurses (VON). She's here to check on an L-Catheter, recently placed in the arm of resident David Sullivan.

Due to circumstances he didn't feel like explaining, the amiable Mr. Sullivan broke several small bones in his left hand in February.

Then all hell broke loose.

"Somehow an infection got in there," he said mildly.

What actually happened is he fell victim to a raging septic infection that came close to killing him.

"He went septic," said Ms Cass-Kerr. "His whole body."

Fortunately, his wife knew enough to get him to a hospital immediately.

Theresa Sullivan is a nurse at the William Osler Health Centre in Brampton, on the site formerly known as Peel Memorial Hospital.

This week, May 8 to 14, has been declared National Nursing Week, a nicety both women appreciate in principle.

In practice, they're probably too busy trying to save lives and comfort people to think about it.

"It's nice to be recognized, of course," shrugged Ms Sullivan. "But what makes it all worth it in the long run is seeing your patients get better. We do it because we care."

Ms Cass-Kerr has been employed with the VON since 1983, first in Peel, and now in Halton.

Today, her full-time beat is in Milton, Campbellville and Kilbride.

There's also one full-time VON professional making the rounds in Acton, and another in Georgetown.

This north Halton team is bolstered by a fleet of part-timers.

Most often, the VON is called to a case by the Community Care Access Centre (CCAC). Visits take place in the patient's home, are covered by OHIP, and can range from less than once a day to up to four times a day.

In her job, Ms Cass-Kerr deals with ventilators, wound dressings and blood transfusions. She has responsibilities and makes crucial calls.

"You have to be independent and you have to make quick decisions," said Ms Cass-Kerr. "Are you going to call a doctor? Are you going to send them off to emergency?"

Today she's here to monitor the catheter which helps pump antibiotics into Mr. Sullivan's ravaged system without daily IV changes.

"Otherwise, the veins can become weak," said Ms Cass-Kerr. "They just blow."

The visit is fairly straightforward. But when Ms Cass-Kerr enters the home of a client, she may be called on to wear the hat of a teacher and social worker.

"They'll sort of utilize us as a sounding board," she said. "You play social worker a lot. And education is a big part of being in the community."



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Client David Sullivan gets his antibiotics for his IV pump changed by VON nurse Heather Cross-Kerr. The vital work of nurses is being celebrated this week.

So is making use of whatever resources are available. "You just work with what you've got and you work with the family," she said.

Both women agree Ontario's healthcare system is facing the double whammy of an aging population in need of more acute care.

And community nurses are, said Ms Sullivan, a vital part of modern healthcare.

"There's support," she said. "We can call them any time. Community nursing has become so important."

Hospital nursing has also changed, and in both arenas, family plays a hands-on role.

"A lot of families live in the old days where they expect the nurse to do everything," said Ms Sullivan. "But they can get them a drink of water or a bath. They're afraid they can't do that."

Today, up to 60 per cent of Ms Cass-Kerr's clients are suffering with cancer.

Some will die, and though she is trained to keep her feelings out of it, her heart must always be at risk.

But there's still the comfort of knowing she helped ease the

passing.

"There's a sense of feeling good because they died at home, which is where they want to be," she said.

Today, more money is being pumped into healthcare. In last week's provincial budget, a full \$1.4 billion was set aside to rejuvenate the ailing system.

But there are problems. A chronic nursing shortage that wasn't helped by slashing nursing school spaces years ago is now being compounded by a hike in education requirements.

Becoming a registered nurse today means completing a four-year degree program instead of a three-year college diploma program.

Sitting in his dining room, flanked by two women with a palpable dedication to nursing, Mr. Sullivan shakes his head in frustration at this.

As both nurses can attest, the legacy of their career is a trail of memories, some sorrowful, others leavened with joy.

But there must be something in it. As Ms Cass-Kerr put it, "I'm still here."

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### COGECO 14 Programming Schedule — May 9th, 2000 - May 15th, 2000

Tuesday, May 9th		Wednesday, May 10th		Thursday, May 11th		Sunday, May 14th		Monday, May 15th	
10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore	10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore	10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore	4pm, 5pm, 6pm	Plugged In! Week In Review	10am, 11am, Noon	Plugged In! Encore
5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm	Plugged In!	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm	Plugged In!	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm	Plugged In!	4:30pm	The Local Scene	5:30, 6:30, 7:30pm	Plugged In!
6:00pm	Seniors Showcase	6:00pm	Municipal Beat	6:00pm	The Local Scene	5:30pm	Seniors Showcase	6:00pm	Living on the Edge
7:00pm	The Issue Is...	7:00pm	Swap Talk - Live!	7:00pm	The Issue Is...			7:00pm	Money Week
8:00pm	Halton Hills Council - May 8th	8:00pm	Halton High Schools Video Competition	8:00pm	Halton Region Council - May 10th			8:00pm	SportsZONE Live

Feature this week: "Municipal Beat" featuring Regional Chairman, Joyce Savoline - Wednesday, 6pm