

Region set to hold strong for more mental health funding

By **RICHARD VIVIAN**
The Champion

Provincial refusals to increase funding for the North Halton Mental Health Clinic have regional councillors set to play hardball.

"It's really a shame that the Province has not seen the merits of what we're proposing. We are really in over-burden trying to look after people that are in extreme need of care. This isn't a minor issue," said Regional Chair Joyce Savoline, who's attempting to schedule a meeting with Minister of Health and Long Term Care Tony Clement to air council's concerns.

"We're like a dog with a bone on this one. (We're not letting go.)"

The ministry-approved budget of \$523,814 for the coming year will force the clinic to run a \$60,000 deficit in order to provide basic services. Services include community-based psychiatric assessment, treatment and follow-up for adults and seniors in north Halton, including Milton.

According to a Regional staff report, the approved budget is \$54,538 less than 1992-93 levels.

Though the clinic is 100 per cent Provincially-funded, services are provided through Halton Region.

"The ministry has taken note of the financial pressures your agency is experiencing in maintaining existing services and supports. Additional funding is not available at this time," reads a letter to Halton's Medical Officer of Health Dr. Bob Nosal from Peter Munns, ministry of health mental health consultant, central west region.

Dr. Nosal told councillors at Tuesday's health and social services committee meeting that he was surprised by this letter because previous verbal discussions with ministry officials had led him to believe additional funding would be made available.

"I'm not saying promises that action was going to occur (were made), but really leading me to believe they would deal with it," he said. "I agree you want to hold their (Province) feet to the fire. On the other hand, for the last three years, with intense pressure they have not moved."

As of mid-August, 57 patients were on the waiting list for services

— waiting between 10 and 12 weeks.

Since the Province is the one saying no more funding can be found, Oakville Councillor Keith Bird recommended giving the Province the responsibility of deciding what services to cut from where. That could give them a better understanding of the issue, he said.

"What do we do, lay people off? Reduce services? Should we send people who need services to Toronto, Queen's Park?" questioned Mr. Bird. "They'll have to tell us who gets services and who doesn't, where we draw the line. We've only got so much money to play with."

A clearer picture of the state of mental health services will be painted next month when a report comes forward outlining the need for services, said Adelina Urbanski, commissioner of social and community services.

"You're going to have an opportunity to see what the lack of funding for these types of programs does for service delivery across the board. It's not just a public health concern," she said.

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The Oakville-Milton St. John's Ambulance Brigade is the first to receive a vehicle donation from Halton Region.

Councillors agreed Tuesday at the health and social services committee meeting to give the community group a 1995 Dodge ambulance that's scheduled for replacement

in the next few months.

The brigade had requested the donation earlier this summer, but the donation was postponed while Regional staff sought to determine if the Burlington or Halton Hills brigades needed it more. Their investigation determined neither community did.

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