

# Milton deemed to be four family doctors short

## Halton's Physician Recruitment Program still plugging away

By **TIM WHITNELL**

Special to The Champion

Angela Sugden-Praysner appears to be winning the battle of the doctors but the war is far from over.

The co-ordinator of Halton's Physician Recruitment Program has been waging her brand of warfare armed with an arsenal that includes cellphones, fax machines, e-mails, pamphlets and a healthy dose of enthusiasm and energy when tracking down and talking to potential doctors for the region.

She's the point person and intermediary who collaborates with Town and City employees, hospital staff, local physicians and community members — through the Halton Physician Recruitment and Retention Advisory Committee — and also connects with potential physician recruits.

The Region's health department began its recruiting initiative in June 2002. The goal is to convince general practitioners, particularly new ones, to come to Halton by selling them on the advantages of the region — and in some cases making them aware of potential provincial financial incentives.

### 11 new doctors in Halton

Ms Sugden-Praysner said that in 2003, 19 new family physicians opened practices in Halton while 16 came to the region last year. So far in 2005, 11 new family doctors have set up practices in Halton.

That's 46 new doctors in less than three years, but those gains are countered in part by an increase in population and the retirement of older, experienced GPs.

"I'm aware of one who retired this summer and who was looking for an associate to turn over control of the practice," said Ms Sugden-Praysner. "There was a doctor in Burlington who stopped (practising) this year and didn't have anyone to take over his patients."

An established doctor will care for anywhere from 1,300 to 2,000 patients. The health ministry says that municipalities should have one family doctor for every 1,380 residents; any number above that may deem that town or city to be under-served.

Milton, Burlington and Halton Hills have under-served status,

with Milton deemed to be four doctors short. Oakville isn't considered under-served.

An under-served designation allows municipalities to apply for funding grants to be used as incentives for new doctors to locate in their area. Relatively new medical graduates may be eligible for up to \$10,000 per year in tuition coverage up to a maximum of \$40,000.

"The town of Halton Hills has an additional \$15,000 available, which is like a relocation grant," said Ms Sugden-Praysner.

### Demographics changing

She noted the demographics for doctors are changing in Halton and across Canada and that there are differences even between municipalities.

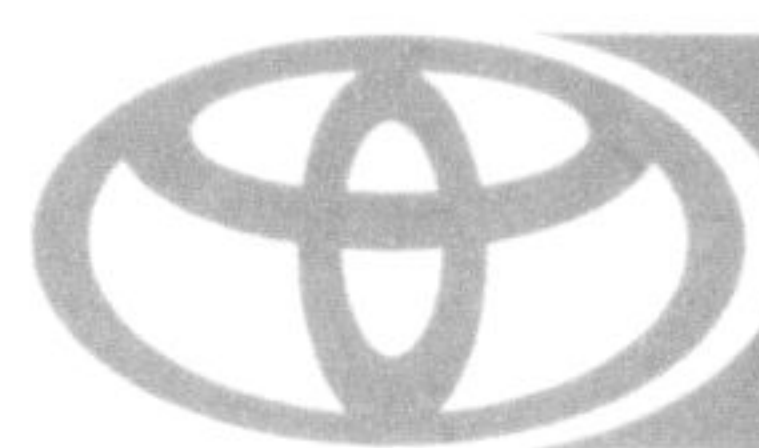
"Milton has a lot of new, young doctors. Burlington and Oakville have more established and older physicians with typically a larger patient base and a lot of older doctors."

The way doctors are working is also changing, she said.

"I know some (older) physicians who work 80 hours per week. There are a lot of younger doctors who want a life. A lot of new doctors are females with families (who may be working 40 to 50 hours a week, and also helping out with clinics)."

In her ongoing quest to bring more GPs to Halton, Ms Sugden-Praysner and one physician from each of the three under-served municipalities recently embarked on an annual recruitment tour. During the last week of September she and the medical trio did a whirlwind tour of five Ontario universities in five days — Queen's, McMaster, Western Ontario, Toronto and Ottawa — talking to medical students with questions about Halton.

"It's the fourth recruitment tour I've been on. It was very busy, lots of leads," said Ms Sugden-Praysner, saying her group had contact with about 300 medical students and residents during the tour.



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