

Death rates on the decline at Halton-area hospitals

By Tim Foran

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The death rate at Halton Healthcare Services, which runs hospitals in Milton, Oakville and Georgetown, dropped significantly in 2008-09, just as CEO John Oliver predicted it would last year.

The hospital corporation recorded a death rate of 78 for the period of April 1, 2008 to March 31, 2009, 31 points lower than the previous year and the lowest figure in the five years the statistic has been compiled. The statistics aren't broken down for the corporation's three individual hospitals.

The rate is calculated by measuring the number of actual, observed deaths to the expected number of deaths. The baseline of 100 is set based on the national average in 2004-05. This year's national average, excluding Quebec, was 93, according to Annette Marcuzzi of the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), which releases the statistics annually.

The average for all hospitals in the Mississauga-Halton Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), which encompasses the area extending from Etobicoke to east Halton, was 91.

CIHI categorizes HHS' rate of 78 as significantly lower statistically, "which tells us we really have achieved a very safe hospital compared to other hospitals which have contributed to that average," said Oliver.

Last year, commenting on the release of

the 2007-08 statistics, Oliver said the slightly elevated death rate at HHS was due to the fact Oakville-Trafalgar Memorial Hospital was placing palliative (end of life) care patients in acute care beds rather than complex care beds, a practice not used at other hospital corporations.

That skewed the results for HHS as CIHI doesn't record death rates for patients in complex care beds, explained Oliver, adding the real rate for HHS was 85 if one excluded palliative care patients as intended. "Next year, we should see a lower score," he said, a prediction which has come to fruition.

Oliver stressed the most recent statistics are the result of a "host of initiatives" and not simply the result of moving palliative care patients to complex care beds.

HHS, along with the LHIN and the Community Care Access Centre network, have worked together to bring down the number of older patients with chronic underlying conditions taking up hospital beds, noted Oliver. Last year, 22 per cent of hospital beds were filled by such Alternative Level of Care patients. That is now down to 8 per cent, said Oliver.

Expediting such patients to long-term care homes or to their own residences via the Province's Healthy Aging at Home Strategy frees up acute care beds, which in turn reduces backups in the emergency department.

Tim Foran can be reached at tforan@miltoncanadianchampion.com.



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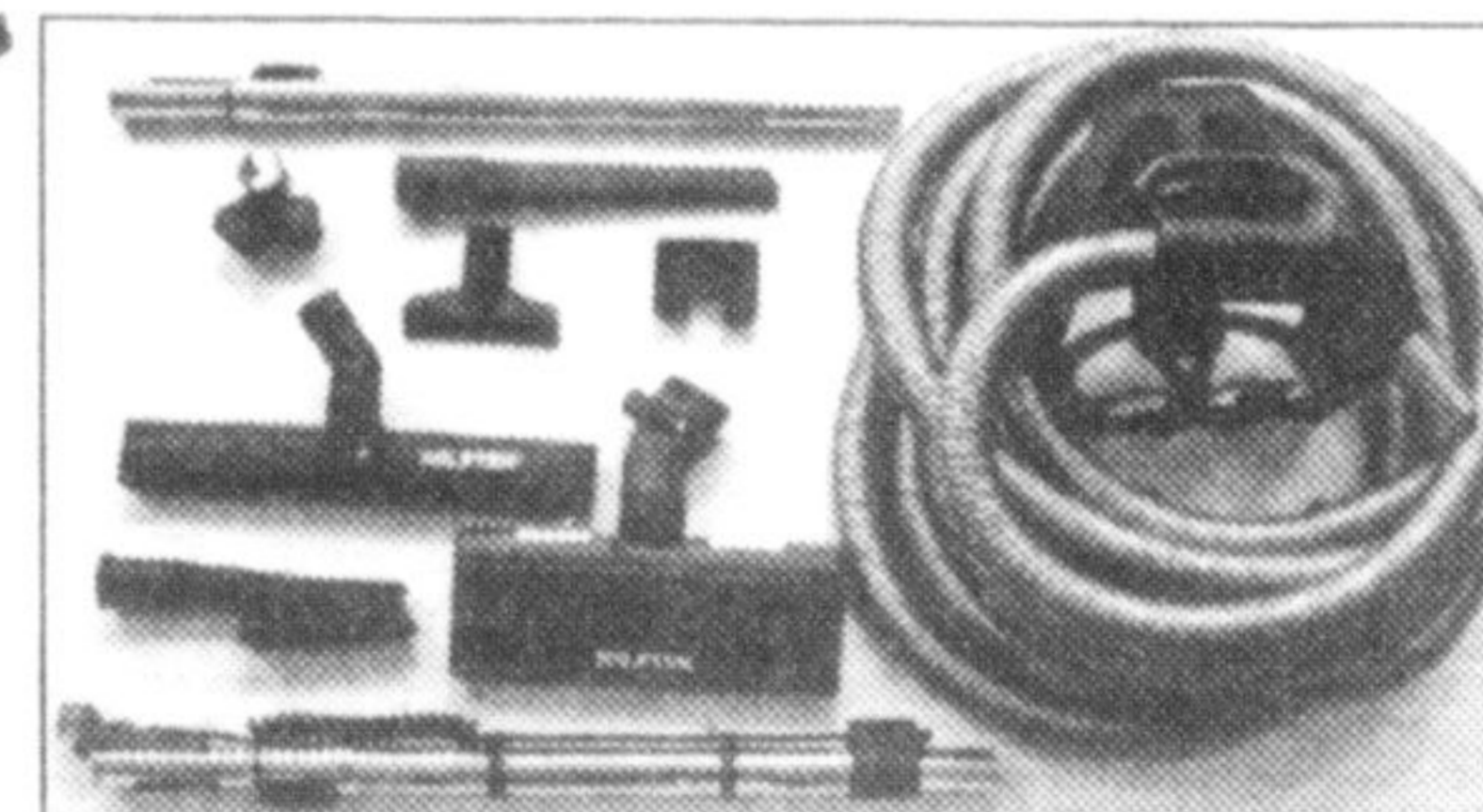
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