

Chronic care beds scarce, no solution is in sight

Halton's ratio of 112 beds per 1,000 seniors is called the lowest in the province

By ROB KELLY
The Champion

Elderly chronic care patients are being shunted out of Halton Region because there aren't enough beds to keep them closer to home, the regional health and social services committee was told Monday.

Judy Donnelly, the executive director of Halton Placement Coordination Services, appeared before the committee together with board chair Carol Gooding to present a

glum picture of growing demand and dwindling options for dealing with the problem.

The two women didn't request specific action from the committee — all they wanted to do was red flag what they see as an emerging crisis that will gather momentum as the aged population swells.

"Our board and staff felt we had an obligation to bring our concerns and observations to the community," Ms Donnelly said. The group helps the elderly and disabled find care

and appropriate accommodations.

In Halton, there are 880 long-term care beds, 776 in homes for the aged and 104 in area hospitals. That is the lowest ratio of beds to people over age 75 in the province, Ms Donnelly pointed out.

While Halton averages 112 beds per 1,000 seniors over age 75, the provincial average is 150, she said. "We are in serious deficit." The situation is not much better in neighbouring municipalities. Peel is second last and Hamilton-Wentworth is fourth from the bottom, Ms Donnelly noted. "These areas are not able to help us."

In 1991-92 the waiting list for beds averaged 373 per month, and of the 418 people who secured accommodation, 24 per cent had to go outside Halton Region, Ms Donnelly said. That 24 per cent figure has been climbing in recent months, and by late fall the out-of-region

placement was a full 39 per cent.

"All the long-term beds are filled. Only with deaths are beds available," Ms Donnelly said.

Given the crunch, "other regions are becoming quite territorial with their beds."

Many of Halton's elderly are placed in Haldimand-Norfolk, Wellington County and Kitchener-Waterloo, Ms Donnelly said. Families frequently have little choice but to accept the distant havens.

"Very often it comes down to a crisis situation and they will take anything, anywhere. We try to get

these people back into the community, but we are not making any promises."

Burlington councillor Doug Greenaway said the lack of focus on long-term institutional care could be "disasterous. To suggest we can have fewer beds for more frail elderly is just not a reality. The problem is moving on! It is increasing and we as a community are not addressing it yet."

"When you make decisions on where you are going to put your dollars, you need to recognize that the frail elderly in your community are in dire need," Ms Gooding said.

Hwy. 401 crash jams traffic

Eastbound Highway 401 was closed for a short time yesterday morning while rescue crews worked to pull a trapped occupant from a car following a four-vehicle accident.

The collision occurred three kilometres east of Guelph Line when a car travelling on the westbound highway crossed the centre ditch in slippery conditions and hit two eastbound cars and a tractor-trailer.

Ambulance attendants and the Milton Fire Department had to pry a car door open to rescue an occupant in the 9:20 a.m. accident, which closed part of the highway for about 30 minutes and backed up traffic for two hours.

At press time, injuries were being described as not life-threatening. The identities of the motorists had not been released.

Beirido Brothers

Kids' concert Sunday

There are still some tickets left for Sunday's zany performance by the Beirido Brothers, the second of two concerts this season presented by Milton Performing Arts for Children.

The duo from the Kitchener area, Sandy MacDonald and Glen Soulis, are professional musicians who perform a wide assortment of music from classical mandolin and baroque to rock. They use conventional instruments — guitar, saxophone, violin, recorder and flute — but Soulis often uses an unconventional method of playing the flute, using his nose.

The Beirido Brothers specialize in humour, making audiences laugh along with their wacky songs. Their show appeals to all ages.

Limited tickets are available at the door January 31, at a cost of \$8. The concert is at Milton Baptist Church and begins at 2:30 p.m. For information on the two-part concert series contact Pam Smith, 878-3146.

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