

Local docs may join protest against health care cutbacks

By KAREN SMITH

The Champion

Milton doctors may join their colleagues across the province in an Ontario-wide protest against the provincial government's health care system cutbacks.

The protest, which will be executed in the form of a job action, is targeted to begin Tuesday, Oct. 1, says Dr. Garnet Maley, president of the Halton Medical Society and a Milton general practitioner.

"There have been discussions (among Milton doctors) about potential service withdrawal," Dr. Maley said. "There is going to be something happening in or around October 1."

He said doctors "won't put down their scalpels" or "leave people dying in the streets," but specialists such as obstetricians and surgeons may not accept new patients.

"A woman who gets pregnant now will have trouble finding an obstetrician who will say, yes, in nine months I will deliver your baby," Dr. Maley said.

Emergency department doctors may refuse to treat walk-in patients seeking non-emergency care, and surgeons may only perform urgent operations, he said.

The Specialists' Coalition, a group representing the interests of obstetricians and surgeons, is encouraging doctors across the province to take part in the protest.

"This isn't a threat," Dr. Maley said. "These guys mean what they say."

Doctors are upset that the Tory government is clawing back income earned above the \$4 billion limit for billings negotiated between the former NDP government and the Ontario Medical Association (OMA) several years ago. Last year it amounted to a 10 per cent clawback.

In addition, the province placed a cap on individual income according to the doctor's specialty.

Obstetricians are particularly up in arms over the cutbacks, in part because of the difficult lifestyle faced by the doctors who deliver babies around the clock, Dr. Maley said. They are also upset over the government's move to slash funding for their annual \$25,000



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malpractice insurance, which increased by \$6,000 last year.

Dr. Maley said Milton doctors have met to discuss job action locally, but no details have been ironed out.

Last week North Halton MPP Ted Chudleigh condemned the planned protest and said doctors who participate "lack integrity. I question the job action," he said in a telephone interview Friday. "It uses a patient as a pawn in the struggle."

Mr. Chudleigh argued that Ontario doctors on average earn 18 per cent more than physicians working in other provinces.

However, Dr. Maley defended the job action, saying doctors who choose to participate are "making a business decision" as a result of government failing to adequately fund the medical system.

Mr. Chudleigh added that talks between government and physicians are ongoing, but not at the rate doctors want. "Governments just don't move that quickly," the MPP said.

The Ministry of Health forecasts that this year alone, Ontarians will require \$509 million in medical services from doctors, that the government will not pay for, according to the OMA.

Government spending on medical care is \$188 million lower than in 1992. Since then, the Ontario population has grown by 700,000 and the number of people over 65, when medical needs increase, has grown by 140,000, the OMA says.

Women's walk to stalk killer disease

Mothers and daughters will walk to promote the number one killer of women next month.

The Chevrolet Mother Daughter Walk for Heart and Stroke will be held Sunday, Sept. 8 at Coronation Park in Oakville.

Mothers, daughters, sisters, friends, fathers, sons, aunts and uncles are invited to join in on the fundraiser organized by the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario in conjunction with Halton and Hamilton-Wentworth chapters.

Heart attacks and strokes continue to be the number one cause of death among women, according to the foundation.

Educating women about the dangers of the diseases is particularly important because many of the risk factors are preventable, said Kathleen Tratch-D'Amico, walk spokesperson.

"The health promotion goal is to inform women of all ages of the impact of lifestyle choices like smoking, nutrition and physical activity."

She said the foundation has been working to do just that for the last two years with success.

"Since the launch of the initiative two years ago, awareness among adult women that heart disease and stroke are their most serious health

concern has increased. However, we still have a long way to go."

Proceeds will fund education programs and gender-specific research.

Participants, who obtain pledges, can register for the 11 a.m. walk at the park on the day of the event from 9 to 10:30 a.m. or in advance at the Halton chapter office, 4190 Fairview St., in Burlington. The registration fee is \$15.

Prizes will be awarded based on the dollar amount of pledges submitted.

For more information, pledge forms, or to volunteer at the event, call 634-7732.

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