

Take from rich, give to poor hospitals: Health council

Underfunded York Region hospitals should be given money taken from overfunded hospitals elsewhere in the province, a district health council report recommends.

Government funding has not kept pace with the growth in the region, said Dr. Jim MacLean, chair of the council's acute care study committee. And the health care system in the region needs an additional \$31.4 million by 1998 just to maintain existing services.

"Funding is not now based on population," said MacLean, chief of staff at Markham Stouffville Hospital. "We believe the status quo cannot be maintained."

Hospital services in York Region cost \$439 million in 1994. However, the current funding method doesn't allow for the resources necessary for prevention and home care, which are the key to keeping a lid on the health care costs.

Now, health care professionals and organizations operate independently, meaning there are both gaps and duplication of services, states the report released last week.

In order to close gaps and cut down on duplication, MacLean said three systems should be set up in the region, each containing one of the three regional hospitals. All physicians in each of the areas, along with home care services, public health and

specialists, would operate under a volunteer board.

The committee is promoting the grouping of services according to programs. For example, a typical cancer care program would link prevention and screening, diagnosis, acute care, rehabilitation and counselling.

"We want to stop people from falling between the cracks," said Cheryl Avrich, project manager of the study.

A study conducted in 1994 showed that nearly half the residents in York Region turn to Metro for health care. And 80 per cent of these people live in the south end of the region. Upgrading services will keep

residents from leaving the region for health care, states the study.

By offering convenience and availability of service, MacLean said residents won't have to look outside their area for health care.

There are a number of methods of improving health care services for the residents of Markham, especially those living in Milliken Mills, including:

- Establishing a community health centre to serve Milliken Mills.

- Improving public transit. Milliken residents now have to travel south into Scarborough to catch a bus to take them to Markham Stouffville Hospital, which is 10 minutes away by car.

- Service providers will make every effort to communicate with users in the language of their choice.

The committee welcomes opinions from the public on its recommendations. Send comments by Oct. 25 to the council at 1091 Gorham St., Newmarket, L3Y 7V1.

An open house will be held in Markham on Oct. 17, 2 to 7 p.m. at the Milliken Mills Community Centre, 7600 Kennedy Rd.

-Julie Caspersen

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