

# Hospital receives funding boost for growth but still \$1.3 million short

By MIKE ADLER  
Staff Reporter

Another \$616,000 injection of provincial cash last Friday has still left Markham Stouffville Hospital \$1.3 million short of last year's support.

Ontario's Conservative government, while continuing a three-year campaign to cut payments to hospitals, is giving extra money to those in high-growth areas like York Region.

This year, it cut its funds to Markham Stouffville by 6.4 per cent, or \$2.4 million, but then announced a \$543,000 contribution from a "growth fund" in January.

Last week, however, Markham MPP Dave Tsubouchi brought word that hospital's share had increased to \$1.16 million.

"These funds are critical for our community," responded hospital president Marilyn Bruner.

"I think you all know this announcement will send us back to the budget table — and I don't think anyone will mind this time around," she told staff in the building's auditorium.

Tsubouchi "has delivered for his town and his community," said hospital board chair Damian Bassett. "But I warn you, we're not done yet," he added.

The Conservative MPP said the greater portion reflected growth in the area and the hospital's status as probably one of the most efficient hospitals in the province.

"And it's nice to reward efficiency," he added later.

But Jim Armstrong, a lobbyist for 17 hospitals inside the Greater Toronto Area but outside Metro said the hospital is seriously underfunded.

"Why should a person in Markham have less access to health care than a person in Toronto?" Armstrong asked last week.

The group estimated hospital funding in Metro is \$650 per person but in neighboring regions it's less than \$400 because hospital services haven't caught up with growth.

"It's the only area in the province with that kind of underfunding," said Armstrong, adding he doesn't know exactly how the province decides how much growth money to give each institution.

"Our hunch is that there were some mistakes in the (first) calculation," he said. "We were able to say, 'These numbers don't look right to us.'"

Bruner, who boasted the hospital has carried out a "ruthless" drive for efficiency, said its budget may be set before March.

It's not known, she said, if there will be any staff layoffs.

To become more efficient, said Bassett, the hospital must send more people seeking treatment to a clinic or nurse practitioner instead.

"We were built to serve people but we weren't built to keep people for an extended period of time," he said.

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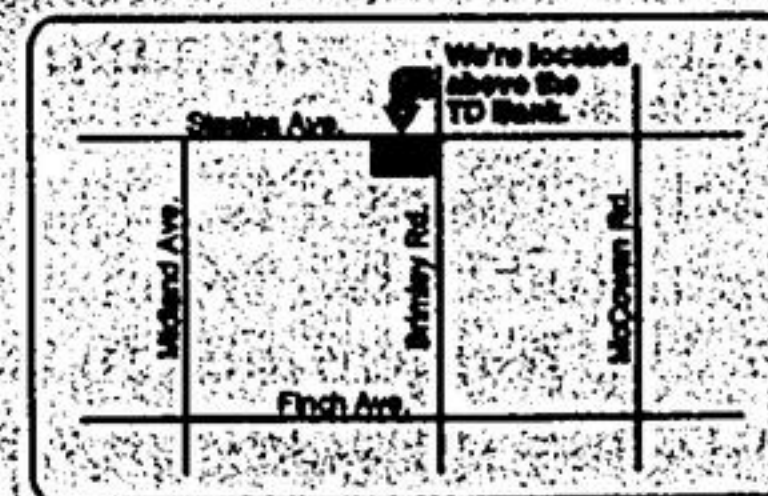
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