

Growth funding on its way: MPP

But region's hospital officials remain skeptical about promises of more cash

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Staff Reporter

York Region hospitals are being asked to sit tight - the money is on the way.

But that hasn't stopped local health officials from wondering why they were passed over last Wednesday, when Health Minister Elizabeth Witmer announced plans to invest \$186 million in capital funding for Toronto hospitals and another \$75 million for emergency services across Ontario.

"We don't expect to get a cent of it," said Dan Carriere, the president of York County Hospital in Newmarket. "I can't see why our project was not recognized."

York County's emergency department, built to handle 40,000 visits each year, will process 57,000 patients in the next 12 months.

"Our numbers are real," Carriere said. "In the last two years, we have seen significant growth here. If the ministry doesn't recognize the need here, there's not much more we can do but close the hospital."

But York-Mackenzie MPP Frank Klees insists more money is earmarked for York Region.

At York Central Hospital in Richmond Hill, officials have made plans to close 17 beds by July 1.

"I've given Dan Carriere my assurance our government will recognize their needs," Klees said, adding an announcement is "imminent."

"I have asked Dan to bear with us to the end of the month when there will be a clear indication of what is being done here."

Carriere has said he will wait until June 30 before making any decisions about service cutbacks.

Markham-Stouffville Hospital president Elizabeth Woodbury has also said that in the short-term, the hospital can sustain services without having to make cuts.

But as growth continues in southeast York Region, Woodbury fears her hospital will soon be in the same position as York's two other hospitals.

At York Central Hospital in Richmond Hill, officials have made plans to close 17 beds July 1 after they received a letter from the province stating that hospitals can't assume growth funding will be provided for 1998-99.

Klees said York Central's decision to publicize the decision to close beds has only created unnecessary fear in the community.

"I wouldn't have done what they did run it up the flag pole and say the worst-case scenario is happening," said Klees. "It is to no one's benefit to create unnecessary anxiety on the part of people who look at the hospital

when they need it.

"It's not good leadership, it's not good public relations. The real needs of the hospital will be met, every identified need of that hospital will be met at the level they need."

However, York Central Hospital president Frank Lussing says words aren't enough to sustain his hope.

"This is not being contrived to deliberately mislead the public," said Lussing. "We have a \$3.1-million shortfall. I don't think people would

want us to spend money with no prospects of recovery down the road."

On Monday, Lussing will present a plan to the ministry to recover the \$3.1 million the hospital hoped it would have by now.

Up until three days ago, York Central was being told it would have to manage within the limits of its current budget.

Klees blames the confusion on the ministry, which he says is sending out the wrong message.

"I have said that statement is incon-

sistent of both the political will of our government and our intention to recognize growth," he said. "It wouldn't be the first time correspondence from a bureaucracy would be inconsistent with the intended will of the government."

"My advice is not to over-react to statements made by the bureaucrats."

In the last two years, hospitals have received growth funding in January.

This year's delay has created budget deficits which continue to grow.

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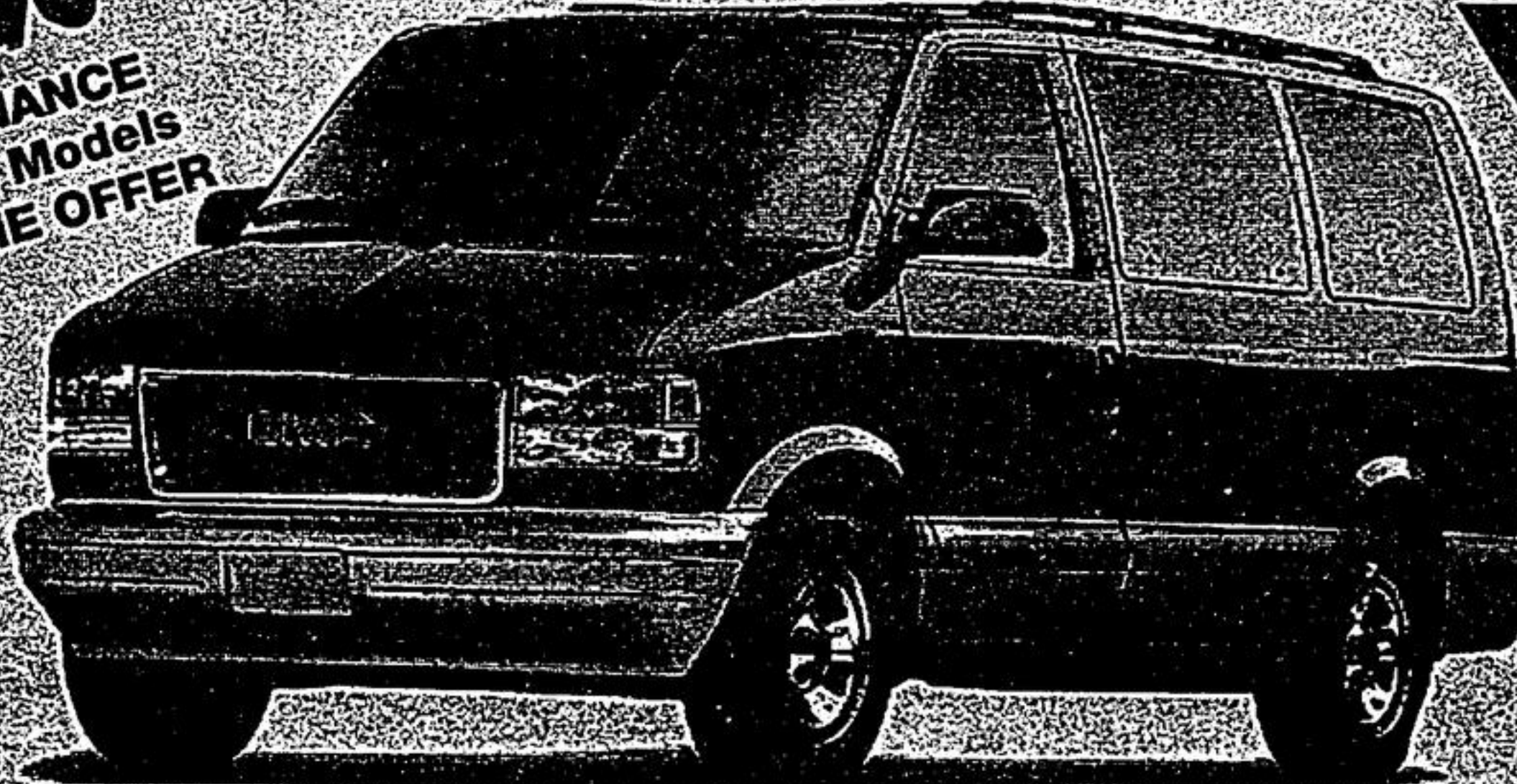
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