

**HEALTH:** Patient and her unborn child get caught in middle of hospital battle

# Doctor shuns local care for patient

BY JENNIFER BROWN  
STAFF WRITER

As she waved to her husband from the helicopter, a pregnant and scared Laura Kirk wondered why she was being airlifted to a London hospital to have her baby.

The 38-year-old York Region resident was just 33 weeks pregnant when her water broke Nov. 13.

But she wasn't in labour and couldn't understand why doctors couldn't monitor her from a local hospital, instead of being flown hours away from her son and husband Rob.

Her wonder turned to anger six weeks later, when she learned York Region hospitals now have the ability to care for women and their babies at 33 weeks, but the option to keep her close to home was never considered by her doctors.

"At first, they were talking about going to Toronto, and then they said there were no beds there and we were going to London, and an hour later the helicopter was ready. I was crying—I was hysterical. All I did in London was cry. I couldn't even eat," she said.

Her medical journey didn't end in London, either. The next day, she was transported from St. Joseph's in London to Women's College Hospital in Toronto, where she spent four days.

There, she received a steroid to help develop the baby's lungs—something she had also received at York Central Hospital in Richmond Hill before being transferred.

She was then sent back to York Central on Nov. 18 and, two days later, sent home to rest. Baby Kayla was delivered by caesarean section Dec. 4, at 36 weeks, weighing six pounds, 11 ounces.

Obstetrician Gindi Nicholas was on call at York Central the morning the Kirks first came in, and she was the doctor who arranged to have Laura sent to London.

Nicholas said she didn't know York County Hospital in Newmarket had its Level II neo-

## INSIGHT

*York County Hospital says York Central should know about neo natal care unit*

natal centre up and running, allowing it to look after babies as young as 30 weeks.

"In the future, certainly I would consider it—it's a heck of a lot better for the mother to be cared for locally," she said.

"They would have been mad if she delivered and they had problems. I'd rather they be mad and, at the end of the day, have a perfectly happy baby," Nicholas said.

Kirk said Nicholas performed an ultra-sound and cautioned her that Kayla's lungs and kidneys may not have been fully formed and would require a feeding tube and neonatal care.

But the Kirks said if York Central and York County are equipped to handle premature babies, they would have preferred to stay in the region.

"It had to be done I suppose, but now that I know York County could have taken me, it angers me."

Despite York County's Level II designation, York Central president Frank Lussing said his doctors will continue to make their own decisions about where patients go.

"It's a clinician's decision, not an administrative decision," he said. "Once people are up to speed in a significant way, presumably the right referrals will be made. The physicians have all the discretion in the world to make the decision that is best for the patient."

He suggested most transfers from York Central will probably go to North York General, which is closer to where most of the Richmond Hill hospital's

patients live.

"The designation gave York County the green light to develop the service more than York Central or Markham Stouffville. But, right now, I believe there are no fundamental differences in the level of training of pediatricians at York County, York Central or Markham Stouffville Hospital."

York County officials strongly disagree, and say the medical community should be well aware of their capabilities.

"If that lady arrived at our emergency department, we would have assessed her and, depending on her needs, we could have cared for her here," said Pat Norman, vice-president of York County.

Norman said all pediatric and obstetrical chiefs of staff in the region know of York County's ability to handle mothers and babies at 30 weeks or more.

In fact, York County has been accepting women at 30 to 34 weeks of pregnancy for two years now.

From 1997 to 1998, York County saw 35 women who were 34 weeks pregnant or less and, of those, 12 babies were delivered. The other 23 were delivered elsewhere but returned to York County's special care nursery.

The hospital's specialized role was made official in April, when it was designated a Level II perinatal regional centre by the Health Services Restructuring Commission.

Level II centres can provide resuscitation and stabilization of newborns for unanticipated emergencies and care of moderate risk mothers and infants.

"Certainly all hospitals are aware of our designation and capability. We've tried to make the information available," said Norman, noting that the chiefs of obstetrics and pediatrics sit together with the management team on the York Region Hospital Maternal and Child Network.

"I can't imagine why physicians at the other hospitals would not be aware of our services," she said.

**'I can't imagine why physicians at the other hospitals would not be aware of our services'**

• York County VP Pat Norman

**DEVELOPMENT:** Growth in Gormley must be accompanied by careful planning, councillor warns

## Big plans in store for little hamlet

BY MIKE ADLER  
STAFF WRITER

The rural hamlet of Gormley has just 50 or 60 homes and just one restaurant, Famous Sams.

Tennis Canada and a developer, ClubLink Properties Ltd., want 1,000 new houses there; the National Tennis Centre including a stadium with 12,500 seats, plus a hotel, restaurant and retail facilities.

It might give this part of Stouffville, quiet but close to Hwy. 404, a major annual sporting attraction some day—and maybe the Olympic Games.

But would such a big development, proposed to York Region by ClubLink last month, be good for Gormley?

"If Tennis Canada doesn't come in, something else will," said Stouffville Councillor Peter Dobrich, whose Ward 3 includes the Woodbine Avenue community.

"I don't see a way of stopping it, and I don't know if we should stop it."

A few things will change in Gormley, but Tennis Canada and the new businesses that come with it will bring jobs to the area, so the residents could work close to home, Dobrich argued.

But Ward 2 Councillor Mark Carroll said putting 1,000 homes "in the middle of nowhere" and near the sensitive Oak Ridges Moraine, goes against all efforts to plan York Region sensibly.

"It doesn't sit well with me," he added. "I'm hoping that people get

down to it and say this has to be debated."

ClubLink's plan calls for the Leslie Street trunk sewer to be extended north to Gormley, but sewers should go to areas where regional planning calls for such urban development to happen, Carroll said.

But besides an environmental assessment on extending the sewer, the proposal must pass several other tests before the region could approve it, changing Gormley in its official plan from an "agricultural policy area" to a "towns and villages" designation.

According to a report to the region's planning committee this week, it must:

- justify the loss of top-quality (Class 1) agricultural land, although most of it is not being used for farming.

- gauge its impact on the local environment, including tributaries of the Rouge River and Gormley's high water table. Development on the moraine is also subject to provincial rules.

- estimate the traffic the tennis centre would produce, and see what road improvements are needed.

- estimate the potential noise, study drainage and surface water management, and look for archaeological artifacts in the area.

Public meetings are promised on the proposal, but ClubLink has told the region it wants all planning approvals ready by March 2001.

## Minister revisits laws

*Legislation will make it easier to prosecute*

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penalty is not stiff enough, Wilfert said.

"It's not enough. Laws need to provide an effective deterrent."

There is one law dealing with cows and horses and a different law for dogs and cats and yet a different law for birds.

There are laws for domestic pets and separate laws for wildlife. And one major criticism is there are inconsistencies and gaps in the animal protection laws, Wilfert said.

Prohibiting a convicted abuser from owning an animal again could be considered, Wilfert said.

"Putting them on a life-time ban is the recommendation."

McLellan also questioned the strength of laws.

"We need to come down on these



**BRYON WILFERT**

Come down hard on people who harm animals

people who willfully injure or kill an animal," Wilfert said. "We've had terrible cases in this country."

McLellan's paper stated that a modernized animal abuse law could make it easier to prosecute offenders and send a message that animals

should be treated with respect.

"It could function as a more effective deterrent to morally reprehensible behaviour—behaviour which threatens not only the welfare of animals, but also the moral and physical welfare of society."



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