

Medics assured of job security

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the process is causing some paramedics stress about whether they will still have a job when it's over.

The region has convinced the police board to waive the cost of the criminal background check and is paying for the psychological tests, but not for all the medical tests.

Medics say the application process does not address their current skill level, but examines their physical and psychological fitness levels.

The fear is good paramedics could fail one of the tests, and lose their jobs.

The process begins Oct. 11 and the region's 200 paramedics will begin their interview process the first week of November.

On top of the rigorous hiring process, the paramedics are also concerned they won't be given first priority for employment, since the region has opened up the competition to paramedics working in bordering communities.

"We're concerned they're not giving preference to people currently working in York Region," said Cowx.

The region decided that paramedics working for services such as Uxbridge/Stouffville or Peel/York should have equal opportunity for jobs in York Region.

"If you work on the Peel side, you have the same rights to jobs as we do, and the medics with less seniority have no assurances."

Cowx said the region's transfer team has told paramedics that 99 per cent of them will be rehired, but many remain anxious about the process.

Of particular concern is an extensive list of about 60 communicable diseases they must be tested for by their doctor. The tests are required for all paramedics under the new provincial rules.

Cowx said some doctors are refusing to sign the communicable disease report, saying they can't certify that a paramedic isn't incubating a disease.

Even Anthony Di Monte, general manager of

the region's new emergency medical services agrees the disease list is long. He said the region will be flexible on the medical tests, but the disease list is required by the province.

"The list is a little exhaustive but our hands are tied. It is actually quite ridiculous, but it is according to legislation," he said.

"We really are trying to make this as painless as possible. I understand that until they have a letter of offer saying 'Congratulations,' it will be difficult — I understand that human factor. We want to hire every paramedic in York Region."

In fact, Di Monte said the region is actually concerned it won't find enough paramedics.

"This will just give the region an idea of the workforce they are inheriting. In fact, we may identify people for management positions."

And while the tests may seem invasive, paramedic program manager Merideth Morrison said she has been encouraging paramedics to be confident they will have jobs.

Morrison, who works out of the ambulance service-based at Markham/Stouffville Hospital, said she has fielded numerous calls from concerned paramedics.

But she stressed the region is just trying to get a profile of their new employees and she has tried to reassure them.

"From their perspective, many paramedics feel they have done this job for many years and, really, they are applying for the same job. The next three months will be a very nerve-racking process," said Morrison. "But the region is taking on an entirely new workforce it knows nothing about."

She said the region has tried to make it clear the process is not intended to weed out employees.

"But, unfortunately, so many medics are so anxious they're hearing it with a slightly different slant," said Morrison.

The region actually fears they won't get enough medics.

"I truly believe, in the long run, we will end up with a very good system."

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