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# York Region hospitals get funding boost

BY DAWN LIERSCH  
Staff Writer

York Region hospitals are hoping to balance their budgets thanks to a major financial boost from the province designed to address the rising costs of

patient care.

Health and Long-term Care Minister Elizabeth Witmer announced Friday more than \$471 million in new funding — the most money ever invested in the province's hospitals.

York Central Hospital in Richmond Hill received the lion's share of funding for York Region. Its share of \$11.6 million represents about 2-1/2 per cent of the total allocation, and will go toward reducing the hospital's projected \$17-

million deficit.

Markham-Stouffville Hospital's projected \$7.8-million deficit will be virtually erased thanks to about \$7.6 million in new funding from the province. The projected deficit was almost double what it was last year due to increased patient volume, staff wage settlements and inflation.

"We're delighted. This covers the community's needs this year," said hospital president Dr. Jim MacLean.

Meanwhile, York Central president Frank Lussing said the move was a step toward more equitable funding for hospitals. Until now, York Central was receiving less funding than other Ontario hospitals on a per-case basis, operating as the third lowest cost hospital in the province.

In addition, rapid growth has caused expenditures to increase by about 30 per cent this year, largely due to York Central's new continuing care centre, Lussing said.

In fact, the hospital is expecting to hire about 500 more staff this year to address growth and the increasing complexity of patient care.

"Up until now, 97 per cent of Ontario hospitals were getting more money than us on a per-case basis and that's unacceptable. We've been asking the province to provide us with more support and it looks like the ministry has now said, 'We agree with you'... I consider this a very healthy share," he said.

"This will allow us to worry less about the budget and to concentrate on patient care."

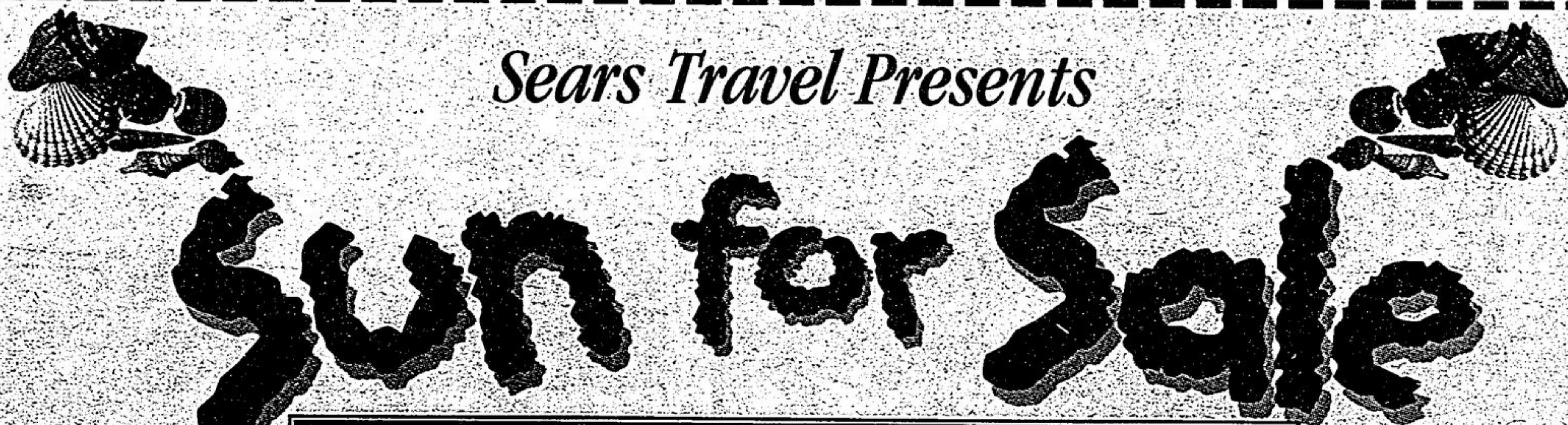
Although York Central's deficit has not been eradicated, the province has hinted more funding will be announced for areas such as dialysis and cardiac care in upcoming weeks. York Central operates the region's dialysis unit.

Southlake Regional Health Centre is also hoping more money is still to come.

Its share of the funding — \$5.2 million — doesn't even cover half of its \$13 million operating deficit. The hospital's total deficit is \$21 million, including its cardiac care centre.

"It's a good start, but I don't think it's the end of what we can expect... We've already spent that money... If we don't get more money, we'll be in for a major deficit. The bottom line is our staff need this relief," said Southlake president Dan Carriere.

"With our high growth and aging population, we're the type of hospital that should be receiving more money. We're ranked as the sixth most efficient hospital out of 111 hospitals. The government can't say we're not doing our part."



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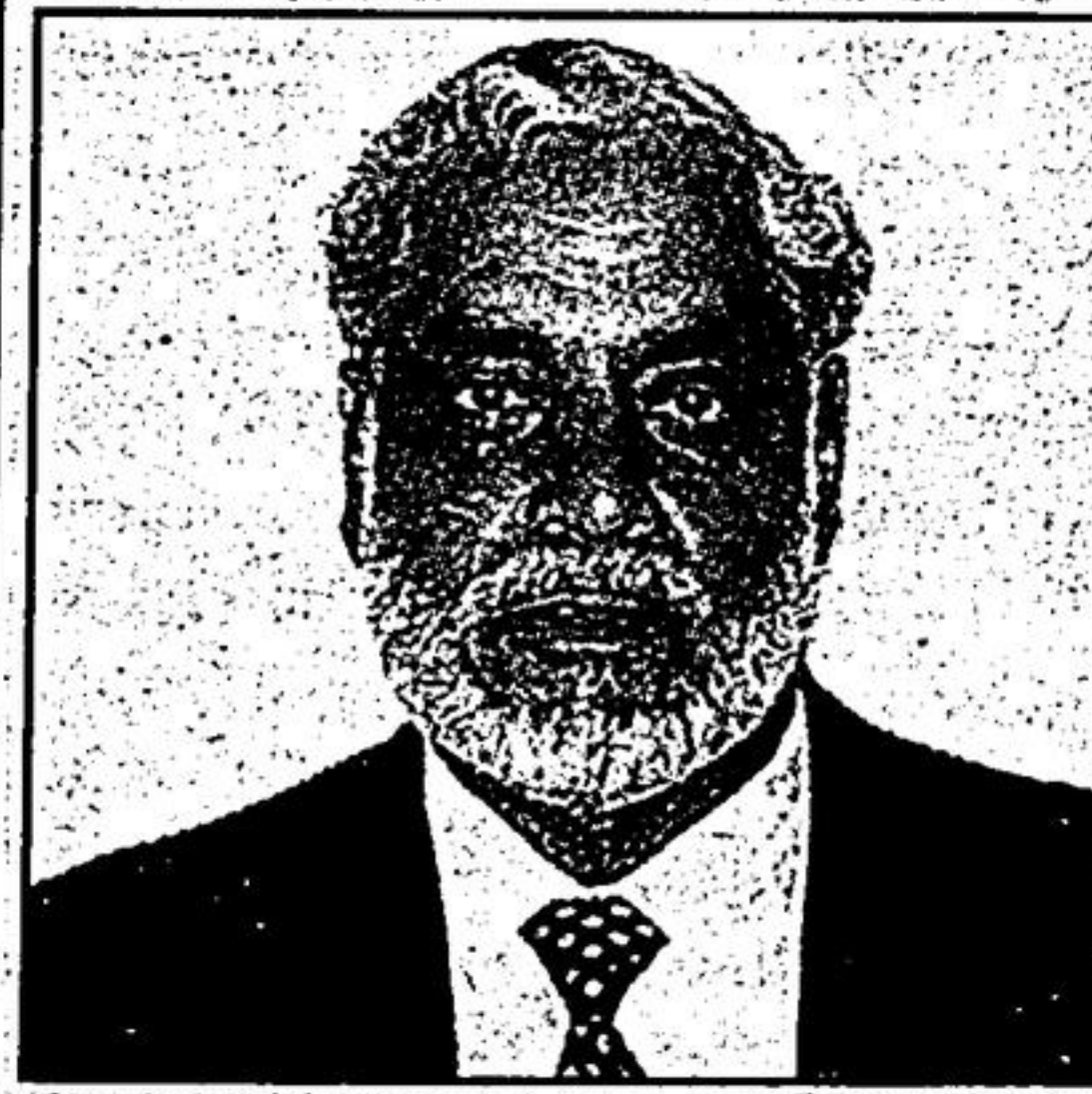
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