

SARS unit empty, Markham Stouffville re-opening services

BY KATHLEEN GRIFFIN
Staff Writer

The last three SARS patients in an isolated unit at Markham Stouffville Hospital were discharged Friday, giving the entire staff an emotional boost.

One patient suffering from Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome remains in critical condition in intensive care, but the hospital's SARS unit is now empty, said president and chief executive officer Dr. Jim MacLean.

"We plan to increase activity in the hospital Wednesday, opening outpatient clinics and diagnostic services," he said.

That will continue through the week and it's hoped by Monday, May 5, surgery will resume as well, he added.

All patients who have missed appointments will be contacted and their procedures re-scheduled, Dr. MacLean said.

"The best advice for patients is to just wait for the

call," he said.

While the priority is resuming services for the surrounding community, Dr. MacLean said the economic impact of SARS on hospitals across the Greater Toronto Area will begin to take a front seat in the coming weeks.

The province has pledged \$25 million for hospitals and their staff — although the Ontario Hospital Association said the gesture is grossly inadequate and that hospitals will need closer to \$100 million.

ADDITIONAL EXPENSES

Treating SARS patients and creating isolation units for them cost money. Safety precautions and new procedures — many of which will remain as the new normal — also cost more. The expense of catching up on missed appointments and tests will be massive.

Health care professionals have also taken a financial hit. Physicians have lost income as surgeries were postponed and their patient

loads dwindled while people stayed away from medical facilities.

Many part-time health

care workers often take shifts at different hospitals, a practice that has been discouraged since the outbreak and

that has also translated into lost income.

But those are matters for the future, Dr. MacLean said

yesterday.

"We're looking at getting Markham Stouffville Hospital back to normal first."

MD stands by criticism

BY LISA QUEEN
Staff Writer

York Central Hospital chief of staff Dr. Richard Schabas, Ontario's former medical officer of health, is accusing the province of dropping the ball in its handling of the SARS outbreak.

But critics say it's easy to be a Monday morning quarterback.

While they acknowledge, in hindsight, some things could have been done differently, they insist experts have done an admirable job in dealing with the mysterious

respiratory disease, which hit Ontario eight weeks ago and has claimed 18 lives, including a 44-year-old York Region man who died Friday.

And they also dispute Dr. Schabas' belief the outbreak is behind us. "I disagree with his point of view," said York Region's acting medical officer of health, Dr. Hanif Kassam.

Dr. Schabas stands by his comments, published last week in the Canadian Medical Association Journal, which have caused a stir in provincial health circles

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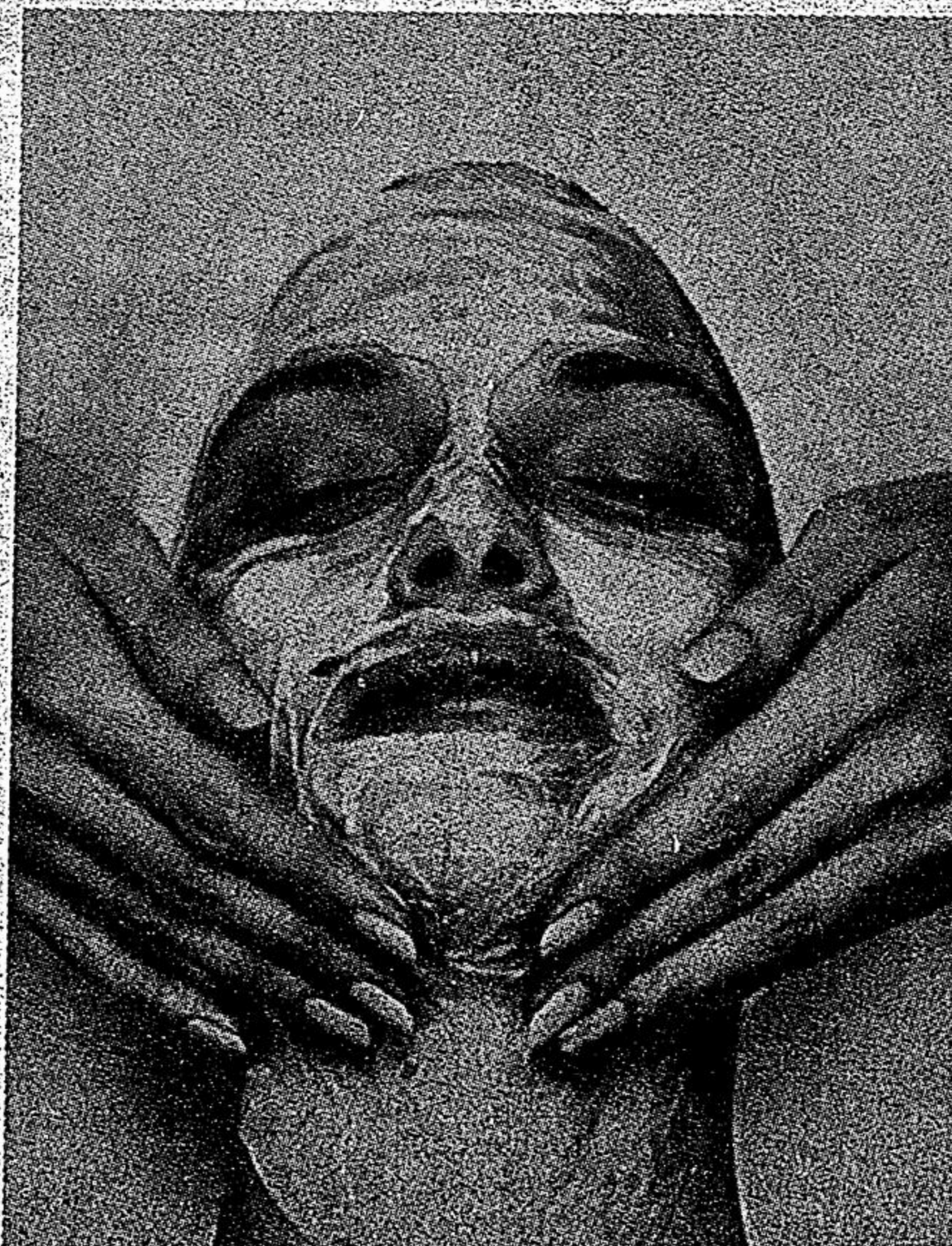
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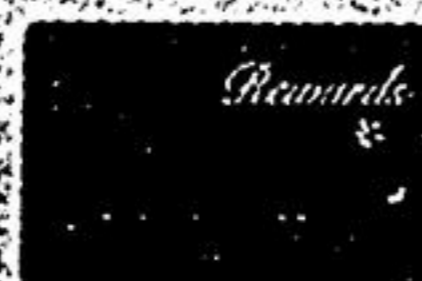
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