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Waiting time for MRI scan up to 8 months in region

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Just like more than 2,200 patients did last year, Mr. Landon had to make a 45-minute trip north to the Southlake Regional Health Centre in Newmarket, which has one of only two MRI machines in York Region.

He says it wasn't that bad the first time. His chronic pain forced him to use a cane and the trip was uncomfortable, but he didn't have to wait more than a few weeks for an appointment.

When results didn't reveal anything about his condition, things became a lot worse.

Another MRI was ordered, but this time he faced a four-month backlog.

"The problem is that while you are waiting, the doctors sort of put everything on hold, hoping the MRI results will have all the answers," Mr. Landon said. "Then you put everything on hold, too, and it can be pretty discouraging if the results don't have all those answers you're looking for."

Markham Stouffville Hospital president Dr. Jim MacLean said the wait time for an MRI is now almost eight months and includes more than 700 local patients.

Of the 5,637 MRI scans performed at Southlake last year, 2,305 were on Markham Stouffville Hospital patients.

The time has clearly come to make the service available here, Dr. MacLean said.

"In 2004, we simply can't deliver high-quality, comprehensive care without access to the right equipment and tools," he said. "An MRI machine can be critical in providing the right diagnosis for our patients and we've waited long enough."

The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, which said one MRI machine should be available for every 250,000 people, agreed.

The ministry has approved the oper-

ating budget for an MRI at the hospital in September, but the \$3.6-million cost to buy and install the equipment remains the hospital's and, ultimately, the community's responsibility.

Hospital foundation president Gina Rosen said the foundation is looking to Markham and Whitchurch-Stouffville residents to help raise the funds, beginning with a direct mail and holiday campaign this month.

"This is the giving season and we're reaching out for help," she said.

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Ms. Rosen hopes corporate and community donations will come through in time to have the MRI machine installed by late spring or early summer 2004.

Dr. MacLean said the MRI wait list will disappear once the machine is installed. In its first year, more than 3,600 examinations will be carried out, that's less than Southlake, but only because Markham Stouffville Hospital will not be handling examinations for the entire region.

To date, doctors still don't know what ails Mr. Landon and he is now confined to a wheelchair, making the trip to Southlake even more difficult.

He's lending his support to the MRI campaign, not only for himself, but because he knows thousands of other residents have faced similar problems, he said.

"It's a necessary medical tool today," he said. "It's a worthwhile thing."

The Markham Stouffville Hospital and the MSH Foundation can be found on the Internet at www.msh.on.ca/

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