

Markham Stouffville first in GTA with new system

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light. I have seen improvement but the improvement isn't with the system, it's with the patient (being more involved in his or her health care)."

Dr. Jim MacLean, president of Markham Stouffville Hospital, isn't surprised by the study's findings either.

"Recent studies, both out of the U.S. and Australia and now here, conclude there are a certain number of adverse events that occur in hospitals and we have to take action," he said.

"I don't think it's a growing concern. I think it's more reports sharing more information with the public."

York's three hospitals, Markham Stouffville, York Central and Southlake Regional Health Centre, have all implemented measures to prevent medical errors.

For example, next month,

Markham Stouffville will become the first hospital in the Greater Toronto Area to implement Smart Pump technology.

The computerized system will be used on patients requiring medications administered by intravenous drip. Studies have shown 61 per cent of serious and life-threatening medication errors occur with IV medications.

"Most studies have shown these systems are a lot better in protecting patients than relying simply on human beings," said Dr. MacLean, adding the hospital has been focusing on improving patient safety for the past three years.

The hospital has set an initial target of reducing intravenous medication errors by 75 per cent with Smart Pump.

In 2001, York Central implemented a patient safety program called Safe

Medication Practices to identify errors and near misses. Mistakes are discussed without assigning blame to find where the system broke down and prevent similar accidents in the future.

York Central has also improved infection control measures since last year's SARS outbreak closed the hospital for 20 days.

"Thanks to the blame-free approach to the reporting of errors and near misses, we have already improved the safety of our medication and sterilization procedures, as well as our infectious disease precautions," said Dr. Richard Schabas, chief of staff at York Central.

But despite precautions, errors still happen.

For example, York Central announced last November more than 250 patients had been tested with an improperly disinfected nasal scope.

In January, a provincial

audit discovered improper infection control procedures were used on two types of equipment in York Central's labour and delivery department.

"Hospitals are extremely complex organizations involving large numbers of people, equipment and procedures," Dr. Schabas said. "That is why patient safety is part and parcel of everything we do here at York Central. Even one preventable death, illness or injury is one too many."

Tammy LaRue, spokesperson for Southlake Regional Health Centre in Newmarket, acknowledged medical errors occur at all hospitals.

"There is no hospital or health organization that will be able to say they haven't had a serious incident or outcome. Southlake is no exception to that. I've been here 19 years and I can say it is very low," she said.

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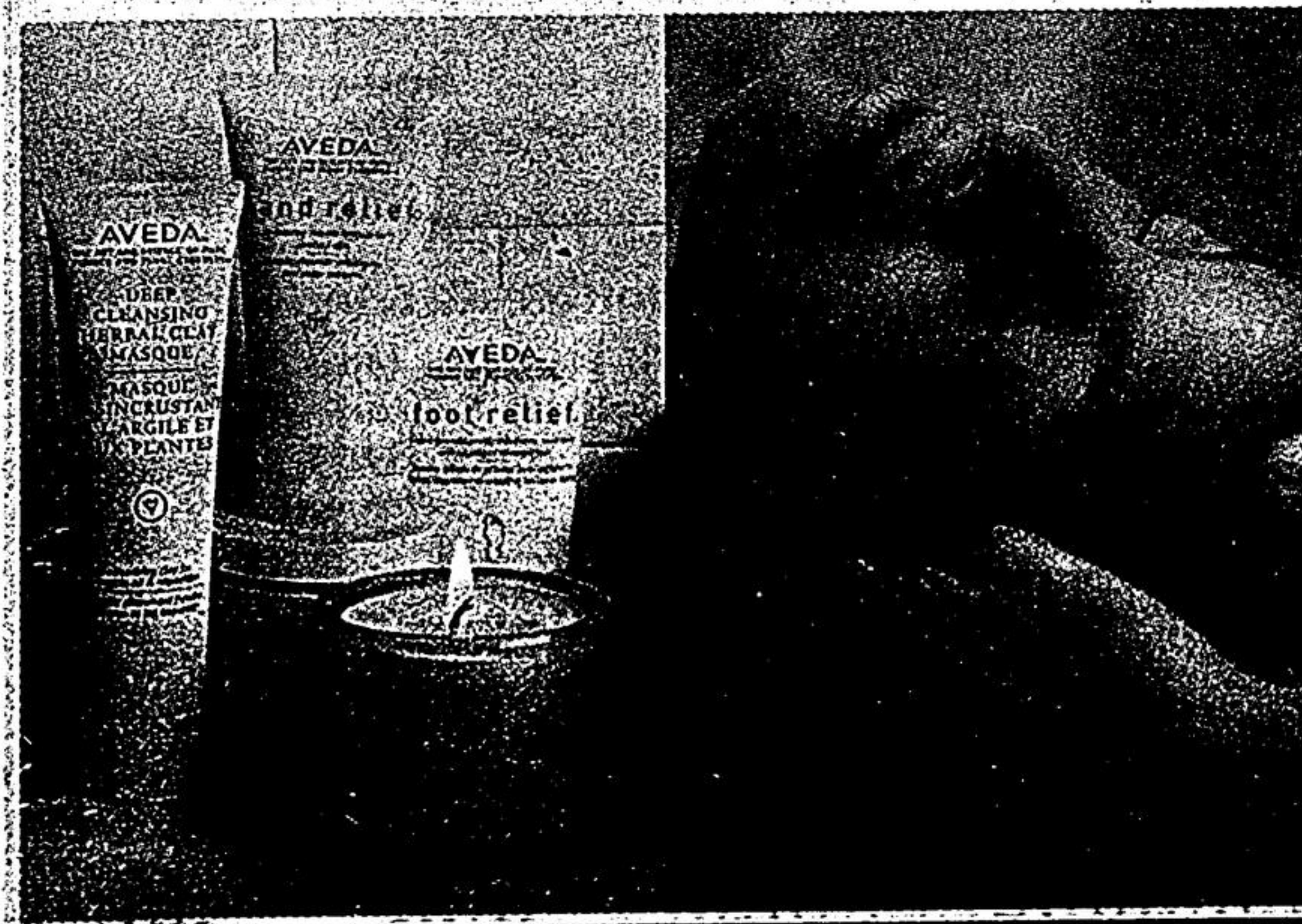
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