

# Hospitals ready for OR shutdown

Anesthesiologists' Feb. 11 meeting viewed as walkout

BY CHRIS TRABER  
Staff Writer

Operating rooms in York Region hospitals will shut down Feb. 11 as most anesthesiologists will be off the job attending a day-long meeting.

While doctors contend the day is an essential meeting of the Ontario Medical Association's anesthesiology section, it is widely viewed as a walkout, protesting the government's reduced waiting list program and languishing contract negotiations.

Whether it's job action or professional development, it means elective surgery at 17 of Ontario's 154 hospitals, including York's three health facilities, will be cancelled that Friday.

Emergency and urgent care will be available at all three hospitals.

Markham Stouffville Hospital has not scheduled elective surgery for Feb. 11, advised public affairs vice-president Chad Hanna.

"We had a sense of what was going to happen," he said. "It will be business as usual. There will be no compromise of patient safety or quality of care."

The hospital's surgical suite will

operate at the regular after hours service to support emergency surgical and obstetrical cases, surgical system director Terri Stuart-McEwan said.

"At no time will patient safety be at risk," she said. "An anesthesiologist will be on site that day."

York Central Hospital has cancelled all elective surgery Feb. 11, confirmed president and CEO Bruce Harber.

"I don't know how many cases are affected but they are being rebooked," Mr. Harber said, adding two of 11 staff anesthesiologists will be on call.

Addressing the waiting list strategy is a concern for surgeons, as well as anesthesiologists, Mr. Harber said.

"We've received provincial funding for extra joint replacement, cataract and cancer surgeries. These cases have to be completed by March 31 and they'll be discussing how to get that done and how to accelerate wait lists," he said.

There are 17 staff anesthesiologists at Southlake, five of whom will be scheduled Feb. 11 to cover emergencies and urgent cases such as cancer and orthopedics.

"Our governing body has convened a meeting on Feb. 11 and has asked for our members to attend," Southlake Regional Health Centre chief of anesthesiology Dr. Ira Bloom said.

"What it means is that we will not be running elective surgery on that date in



BRUCE HARBER: York Central Hospital president and CEO says Feb. 11 surgeries are being rebooked.

the day time.

He would not speculate on any future action.

"I can't speculate on that," he said. "The meeting is important in that we need to determine the anesthesiologists' situation in Ontario."

gists' situation in Ontario."

The waiting list issue will be a major topic of discussion.

"We have all taken on extra cancer and orthopedic cases. The profession is working harder than usual and some have had to forego vacation time. Some orthopedic surgeons have wait lists in excess of a year. That's a real problem the government has to address," Dr. Bloom said.

The association will launch a \$1-million radio and newspaper advertising campaign this weekend designed to kick start contract negotiations with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The ads suggest overworked doctors can't solve long waiting lists and 142 Ontario communities don't have enough physicians.

The contract tabled by the government in late 2004 excluded pay hikes in the first year and was rejected by 59 per cent of association members — including 77 per cent of anesthesiologists, who claim Ontario needs another 90 in their specialty.

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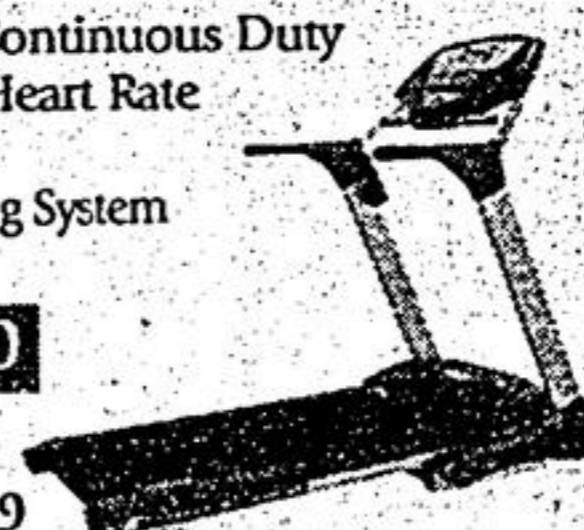
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