

Private health ruling 'wake-up call': hospital CEO

BY CHRIS TRABER
Staff Writer

The Supreme Court's ruling against Quebec's ban on private health insurance is a wake-up call to Ontario health care providers, Southlake Regional Health Centre CEO Dan Carriere said Friday.

The decision stated it is unconstitutional to prohibit private insurance when the public system fails to deliver reasonable service.

"If the government says we're entitled to a certain level of service, the public should not be penalized with just the common denominator of service," Mr. Carriere said.

"I don't know the level of wait lists in Quebec but, in essence, waiting jeopardizes the well-being of patients, so why shouldn't they be able to seek alternatives? You can't deny timely access to health care."

Thornhill MPP Mario Racco has no desire to see privatized health care in Ontario, but he sees the writing on the wall.

"This is a golden opportunity for provinces to fix problems, but we need increases in federal funding. We need to pump more money into provincial health care," he said.

"Unless we do that, there may not be any way we can prevent health

care from becoming private."

Oak Ridges Conservative MPP Frank Klees sees no reason to prevent private health care.

"The only way to ensure that we preserve our universal health care system is to provide freedom of choice for our citizens. Canada is only one of three countries in the world that doesn't allow its citizens to purchase private health care as an option. North Korea and Cuba are the others," he said.

"European countries are on the forefront of a universal health system that provides a parallel choice for its citizens. I say, categorically,

we will not ever eliminate wait lists in this country without providing that option. For every person who may choose to access private care, that's one less person waiting in a universal provincial system."

Mr. Klees said many of his constituents want private health care.

"Some are taking trips to New York, Michigan and Quebec to access the services they should be able to access here."

But the province has made major strides in reducing queues for diagnostic and surgical services, Mr. Racco said.

"Still, we need to do more," he

said. "Ontario is moving in the right direction. For one thing, York Region needs a new hospital in Vaughan. Our wait lists would be affected significantly and positively with a new centre that could serve more of our residents. That would relieve pressure on everyone."

Mr. Carriere agreed the government's agenda to reduce wait times is working.

"We're doing the best we can and we've been successful in getting more cataract, joint replacement and cancer-related surgeries. We want to do more. The government wants us to do more," he said.



TRACY KIBBLE

Freebies won't entice drivers

We really do have a love affair with our air-conditioned automobiles.

Heck, we couldn't even entice readers from across York Region — that's more than 200,000 of us — to hand over their car keys for a few days to take York Region Transit.

When we initially asked readers to take part in our Great Transit Challenge as part of our State of Public Transit series, we expected, as we always do with contests, we would be flooded with willing participants.

Then something strange happened. Nothing. Three e-mails trickled in. That's three from the entire region!

We thought we'd have to put the brakes on the challenge altogether.

Then Aurora's Canadian Tire general manager Jeff Levy stepped up to the plate and offered to give away a 40,000 BTU Sunbeam barbecue to entice drivers to park their cars and hop on the bus for two days of their choice.

Still nothing. We did manage to get one man from Markham to hop on the bus and Newmarket Regional Councillor Tony Van Bynen agreed to give it a whirl, but the "challenge" really wasn't there.

It is evident it's going to take a lot more than a grilled steak and some free bus passes for car-dependent suburban commuters to leave their cars at home.

It is likely going to take many years to entice residents out of their SUVs and into bus shelters.

Ironically, it was the popularity of the automobile in the 1920s that stalled transit success.

Since then, planners have developed suburban neighbourhoods around the automobile, figuring even if people used transit, they would drive to the bus.

Eighty years later, it's starting to slowly change but it won't be easy.

York Region, for now it seems, is just not interested.



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