

Woman waits 42 hours in ER for chemo

2-day stay on stretcher raised at Queen's Park

BY MIKE POWER
Staff Writer

A woman who needs chemotherapy waited nearly two days on a stretcher in the Markham-Stouffville Hospital emergency department before she could get a hospital bed.

"I just felt so powerless waiting there," said Danielle Caligiuri, whose mother, Christel, 63, was admitted to Markham-Stouffville Hospital at about 1 a.m. Monday.

"She couldn't get her chemotherapy until she got a room. We couldn't even find a pillow for her."

Ms. Caligiuri said her mother has had multiple myeloma, a kind of blood cancer, for five years.

The condition spread to her liver, causing severe pain and she went to the hospital early Monday morning, where she found herself waiting for 42 hours.

John Tory, leader of the provincial Progressive Conservatives, raised the issue in the legislature Tuesday.

"There is no bed for her. She can't go on chemotherapy, so they have her on a morphine drip. She's been on that drip on a stretcher in the emergency room in the Markham-Stouffville Hospital for more than 24 hours now.

"She's not eating or drinking. She's literally lying there dying on the stretcher," Mr. Tory told Minister of Health and Long-Term Care George Smitherman, according to a Hansard excerpt.

"I wonder how this can be... (and) what you have to say to the family of Ms. Caligiuri."

The number of acute care beds in Ontario was cut by 22 per cent during the Conservatives' eight years in power, dubbing the situation a "capacity challenge," Mr. Smitherman said.

"What I would say to any family member in the province of Ontario is that the circumstances with respect to our health care system are a shared challenge," Mr. Smitherman said.

Although her mother now has a room, she is still waiting for chemotherapy, Ms.

Caligiuri said.

"One step at a time," she said. "We're still happy to get a room."

She was quick to sympathize with the emergency room doctors and nurses, who she said seemed "run off their feet."

"It's been an eye-opener for me to come and see this," she said. "Somebody needs to put some money into this."

Most people needing chemotherapy don't have to wait once they have been

seen by a hematologist, according to a new release from Markham-Stouffville Hospital. Chemotherapy is rarely part of emergency treatment.

"None of us want to see anyone waiting overnight on an emergency room stretcher but it does happen. ERs don't operate in isolation of the rest of the health care system and system changes are being addressed to build capacity, address patient flow within the hospital and further reduce wait times in emergency departments,"

Dr. David Austin, chief of emergency, said.

The hospital did not comment on Ms. Caligiuri's specific case, citing patient confidentiality.

A recent provincial emergency room funding announcement shows the government understands the need to address patient flow throughout hospitals, Dr. Austin said.

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