

# McGuinty government owes you apology: Tory leader

BY MICHAEL POWER  
Staff Writer

How much progress did we see in 2006 towards better health care in York Region?

The answer depends on who you ask.

"I think the government has done a tremendous job in tackling surgical wait times," Markham Stouffville Hospital CEO Janet Beed said.

The province promised to reduce wait times in hip and knee procedures, cataract surgery, cancer surgery, cardiac procedures and MRI and CAT scans.

Cardiac patients at Markham Stouffville Hospital now get their

operations almost immediately. Those needing cataract surgery once faced months on the waiting list. But that time has been reduced to weeks, Ms Beed said.

The hospital has performed 200 additional hip and knee operations since Dalton McGuinty's Liberals started their wait times strategy.

That means patients otherwise facing year-long waits can have those procedures in much less time, Ms Beed said.

But Premier McGuinty should apologize for misleading you on wait times, Progressive Conservative leader John Tory said.

A \$2-million media campaign

trumpeting shorter times was deemed misleading by Advertising Standards Canada, an independent review agency.

Ontario's Auditor General Jim McCarter, also questioned wait time reductions, saying those claims should be taken with a grain of salt.

"I don't think you can find a more stunning indictment of those wait time numbers," Mr. Tory said. And while acknowledging some wait times have become shorter, others have grown longer, he said.

For example, wait times for cancer procedures at Southlake Region Health Centre in Newmarket have climbed 51 per cent since

2005, Mr. Tory said.

While wait times in the province's five main focus areas have dropped, those needing other procedures such as shoulder operations still face long lines.

During a visit to Southlake last week, Health and Long-Term Care Minister George Smitherman conceded the government has work to do in shortening some wait times.

"Cancer surgeries are a bit of a challenge, but we've made tremendous strides," he said, noting the number of cancer cases has risen by 10 per cent a year.

It's possible wait times may not have fallen as much as the govern-

ment has claimed, but \$2.7 billion pumped into the system has definitely made a dent in those times, Thornhill MPP Mario Racco said.

"We've been putting so much money into health care that waiting times have been reduced significantly," Mr. Racco said. "Quite frankly, John Tory makes a number of statements that are incorrect."

All three York hospitals have received money to expand, he said. York Central in Richmond Hill, for example, is scheduled to finish the first phase of its expansion project by 2009, which includes tripling the size of the emergency and diagnostic imaging departments.



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