

Burn victim waits hours before receiving treatment

BY MICHAEL POWER
Staff Writer

A Markham mother is angry emergency room staff at Markham Stouffville Hospital said the facility was too full to treat the burns on her daughter's feet, leaving the disabled 27-year-old untreated for several hours.

Bergen Nutson was attending a respite camp when she was admitted to Stevenson Memorial Hospital in Alliston Dec. 7, mother Leea Nutson said.

Bergen has Rett syndrome, a disorder that leads to slowed brain and head growth, seizures and developmental delay, among other symptoms. The condition has also left Bergen unable to speak.

Ms Nutson — still unsure of how her daughter's feet were burned — went to the Alliston hospital after getting a call from the camp.

"Lo and behold, they unwrapped her feet and she had blisters the size of hamburger buns on each foot," Ms Nutson said.

Stevenson Memorial had Bergen moved to Markham Stouffville Hospital Dec. 12, since she and her daughter live about two minutes from that facility, Ms Nutson said.

But when the ambulance carrying her daughter arrived at the emergency department at 7:45 a.m., staff there said the facility could not admit her because it was full, she said.

Staff at the hospital suggested she take her daughter either home or back to Alliston, Ms Nutson said.

Bergen remained on a stretcher in a hallway in the hospital until about 5 p.m. that night, when she was admitted, she said.

The next morning, Bergen was transferred to the Ross Tilley Burn Centre at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre.

Bergen will receive skin grafts on the second-degree burns on her feet, Ms Nutson said.

Part of the reason for the difficulty in having her daughter treated in Markham is the growing population has put pressure on the system that the emergency room can't match, she said.

"Emergency was a zoo," said Ms Nutson.

Indeed, the hospital runs a busy emergency room, said Julia Scott, Markham Stouffville's vice-president of organizational effectiveness. The hospital plans to wrap up a re-development, which will include an expanded emergency area, in 2013.

Although she couldn't comment on any specific case at the hospital, Ms Scott noted several other facilities across Ontario face similar challenges in their emergency rooms.

"We're not unique in terms of wait times," she said.

Often, health services outside hospitals can help ease pressure on emergency rooms, said Tariq Asmi of the GTA/905 Healthcare Alliance.

For example, community health centres, which provide primary care and health promotion programs, can offer an alternative place to seek treatment.

But the GTA hosts about eight or nine such centres, he said.

The problem of emergency room wait times exists in areas across Ontario with booming populations, he said.

"It's not just the 905, it's other high-growth regions," Mr. Asmi said.

The province also kicked off a plan, called the Aging At Home Strategy, designed to help seniors remain in their homes until a later age, said Chris McPherson, director of public affairs at the Ontario Hospital Association.

The plan includes expanded home

care and support services for seniors, which will help ease pressure on hospital emergency wards.

"We believe that over the next four years this strategy will ease some of the pressure being reflected in emergency room wait times," he said.

Ms Nutson isn't sure how long her daughter will remain at Sunnybrook. Bergen could end up at Markham-Stouffville Hospital again, or even released to home care.

"At this point, everything is up in the air," she said.

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