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Town should offer incentives: MD

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Dr. Philpott said. "We would love to see the town offer more."

More doctors will be needed in the wake of an Ontario bill passed in

December regulating the ratio of physicians to residents over the next seven years. The bill calls for 560 patients per doctor in 2008, with that number going down each year during the next seven years to 450 per physician. The latter number works out to more than 220

doctors per 100,000 people. That means a lot more doctors will be needed in Stouffville over the next few years to meet these targets.

Dr. Patrick Wat said his clinic is busy, but still taking patients. Many of the patients wanting to switch to the clinic are new residents who are changing from their doctors in their old communities such as Mississauga or Scarborough.

He feels there are probably enough doctors here, especially if two more full-time physicians come to Stouffville.

To meet the needs of those seeking female physicians, "we have a lot of women doctors in town", Dr. Wat said.

*Have you had trouble getting a family doctor in Stouffville?
e-mail jmason@yrmg.com*

Ontario is currently eighth out of 13 provinces and territories when it comes to the average number of doctors to patients, with 174 physicians per 100,000 Ontario residents.

In the Yukon, there are 226 physicians per 100,000 people, the highest in the country. In Nunavut, there are only 35 physicians per 100,000 people.

In Ontario, there's only been a 2-per-cent increase in physician numbers from 2002 to 2006, according to the Canadian Institute for Health Information.

The average age of physicians in the province is rising, from just under 47 in 2002 to slightly more than 48 in 2006.

The Ministry of Health is always looking to increase the number of doctors in the province.

"There is a shortage in some areas," spokesperson Andrew Morrison said. "Thirty-seven areas of the province are designated as underserved for general physicians."

Clinics with several physicians and other health care workers can see more patients per doctor than a physician working alone, he said.

A lot of communities in Ontario have taken steps to recruit physicians, Mr. Morrison said, offering incentives such as paying doctors' tuition, or giving a flat fee for them to start practicing in their town.

The ministry has used strategies such as increasing enrolment numbers at medical schools, increasing training positions for family physicians and trying out a nurse practitioner program in Sudbury.

People are more willing to drive farther for specialists, Dr. Philpott said, but prefer to have their family doctor, for their children and their elderly, in their community.

For more information from the Canadian Institute for Health Information, visit cibi.ca

Go to health.gov.on.ca for information from the Ministry of Health.

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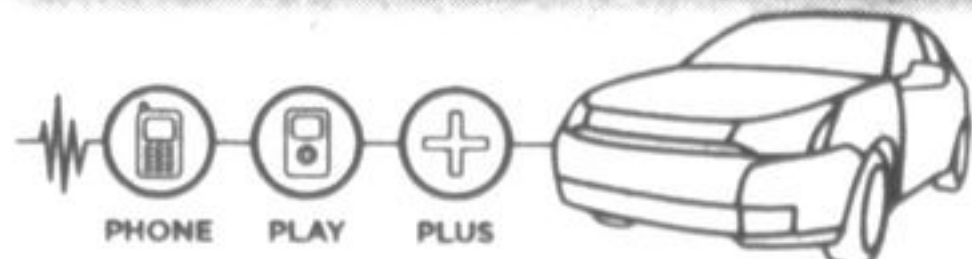
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