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Northumberland Hills Hospital cuts leave thousands without care: 4,600-signature petition delivered to Legislature

TORONTO: A group of concerned citizens traveled more than 100 km from Cobourg to Toronto today to present a petition calling for a halt to service cuts at the Northumberland Hills Hospital including closure of a diabetes education clinic, the end of all outpatient rehabilitation services and cuts to 26 hospital beds.

There is no public replacement for these services in the entire County of Northumberland. Twenty per cent of 60,000 local residents are seniors. Last year more than 3,000 patients were assisted by the diabetes clinic, while outpatient physiotherapy and occupational therapy had more than 5,500 visits. The homecare system in the area is in deficit and has restricted admissions to homecare. The area also lacks sufficient beds in licensed nursing homes. This already means long waits for care.

The Ontario Health Coalition believes that these cuts are a violation of the Canada Health Act and is calling on the McGuinty government to intervene.

“When the rehabilitation clinic is closed there will be no access to OHIP-covered physiotherapy or occupational therapy in the entire County of Northumberland,” said Paul Donnelly. “Many of us have inadequate or no private insurance. We will not be able to afford the high cost of private care.”

Local citizens are insisting on equal access to care. “The government is forcing cuts to our hospital beds that will leave frail and elderly patients without appropriate care,” said coalition co chair Peggy Smith. “The Local Health Integration Network has already admitted they do not have sufficient funding to provide interim support for the beds that are being cut. There will be no savings when these patients end up back in the emergency department.”

“The cuts to the diabetes clinic are short-sighted and will mean more costs for patients with worse health outcomes,” said Linda Cowburn. “If these cuts go through there will be no services for Type 1 diabetics, patients with complex Type 2 diabetes who require insulin, those with insulin pumps, and pregnant women with diabetes. Local doctors have already expressed concern they will have nowhere to refer these patients.”

“Last month”s provincial budget funded hospitals at less than the rate of inflation for the third year in a row, even though Ontario’s hospitals are funded much less than their counterparts across Canada,” noted Natalie Mehra, director of the Ontario Health Coalition. “The cuts proposed in Northumberland Hills are a violation of the Canada Health Act, leaving thousands of patients without reasonable access to vital care. Seniors will be particularly hard hit with what amounts to privatization of their hospital beds and rehab services. McGuinty must intervene to rectify the situation his government has created.”

For more information:

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