

Ontario Health Coalition

Update on the Durham-Scarborough Hospital Mergers

November 2, 2016

As you may have heard, two mega-mergers have been proposed for the hospitals in Durham (including Oshawa, Bowmanville, Ajax and Port Perry) and Scarborough (Centenary, Scarborough Grace and Scarborough General).

We have sent out a briefing note on the mergers and we have attached it and pasted it below. The costs are huge and have been escalating. They now total almost \$50,000,000 (\$50 million). The government is now spreading rumours and attacking the Health Coalition for raising concerns about these plans.

We have been attacked by the government for raising questions about the mergers. This update is to clear up the facts and let you know what is happening and what you can do about it:

Bigger is not better

We have all lived through the mergers of the 1990s and the costs were enormous. They led to staff layoffs and losses of services, particularly in the smaller hospitals that were merged. Over the years, Port Perry and Bowmanville lost services. Even very large hospitals like the one in Ajax-Pickering have lost services to Scarborough. They have not worked for the bigger towns either. Now, all the patients from the region have to travel in to line up for fewer hospital beds, leading to massive overcrowding and poor conditions.

Though the mergers were supposed to save money in administrative costs, what we have seen instead is a ballooning of hospital CEO salaries and benefits, tiers of management and consultants and PR people, and relentless pressure to reduce the scope of services in our local hospitals so that they are not community hospitals anymore. In small towns, merged hospitals have been devastated, losing the majority of their services, or in the worst cases, having been closed down entirely.

Today, the plan for the merged hospitals is that they are no longer to be community hospitals with the range of services needed to provide for the health care needs of their towns. The plan is that there is one hospital spread across multiple sites. Each site specializes in fewer services. Patients have to drive to one town for their cataracts, another town for palliative care, another town for surgeries, another town for chronic care, etc. The costs and the hardship that these plans have caused, fall on the backs of patients: the sick, the elderly, the dying and their families. We do not support it and the people of Ontario have never been given any say about it.

We are deeply concerned that the proposal is that the costs of the mergers will be paid out of the operating funds of the hospitals. In Durham, this cost is \$18.2

million. In Scarborough, the cost is almost \$30 million. In total, the costs are almost \$50 million. This is a big hit. To put it in context, when the Scarborough Hospital cut \$17 million just a few years ago, it resulted in a cut of 200 full-time nurses, health professionals and patient support staff, cuts across virtually every department in the hospitals, closure of outpatient clinics, cuts to operating rooms. The list of cuts was pages long.

We are also concerned that the plan is for Ajax-Pickering to lose its voice. Under this plan the Ajax-Pickering hospital is to be taken over by Lakeridge Health. The Friends of the Ajax-Pickering Hospital group have been asking for equal representation on the hospital board once the takeover is done. So far, they government has refused to do this.

We are concerned that once the hospitals are merged, services will again be rationed between the hospital sites now spread over an even wider area, as they were after the last mergers. We are particularly concerned that the smaller sites will fare the worst from this arrangement.

There is no transportation system running from Ajax to Bowmanville and Port Perry to support the notion that there can be one hospital spread across these sites. What we need now is a restoration of services in local communities, not further rationing of services.

The theory that mergers save money has never worked in Ontario and elsewhere. In fact, it has led to a severe loss of services, burgeoning management and CEO salaries, a windfall for consultants, and loss of public control over our hospitals. In the case of the Durham-Scarborough mergers, even the hospitals' own documents filed with the government state very clearly that there are almost no "efficiencies" to be found and that the costs will be close to \$50 million. It is fair and reasonable to ask these questions of our government and expect answers.

The government's response to date

Instead of answering our questions and concerns the government has decided to try and attack our credibility. Local MPP Granville Anderson in Bowmanville told the radio station that we were saying that the Bowmanville Hospital is going to close. This rumour has been echoed by the hospital CEO at Lakeridge. It is patently false.

Our message is clear and consistent. We have warned, just as we are here, that the high costs of the merger will come out of the hospital operating budgets negatively impacting services, that the smaller sites are

Where did this plan come from?

Several months ago, the Liberal government lost a seat in a by-election in Scarborough to the Conservative Party. There are five ridings in Scarborough, with four held by Liberal MPPs. The new hospital for Scarborough has been made a high priority. What the public has not been told is whether the plan is to close multiple hospitals in Scarborough and replace them with one, or whether they are committed to keeping open the Scarborough Grace (Birchmount site) and the Centenary site as well as the Scarborough General. This question needs to be answered by the government.

Today, the merger proposals have come back because the government wants to split Centenary from the Ajax-Pickering hospital site and merge it with Scarborough. The plan is to build a new hospital in Scarborough and they don't want Centenary competing for funds.

In a number of communities right now, the government is planning to close down multiple hospital sites and replace them with one new hospital. In Niagara, their plan is to close five hospitals (Welland, Port Colborne, Fort Erie, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Niagara Falls) to replace them with one. In northwest Toronto, the government recently closed three sites at Humber River Regional hospital, including a hospital in one of

You can help

Please spread the word.

Join the rallies this **Saturday at 12 o'clock noon:**

In Ajax – at the Ajax Pickering Hospital. The rally is targeted to bring a message of the public's concerns to Member of Provincial Parliament Joe Dickson.

In Bowmanville – at Member of Provincial Parliament Granville Anderson's office 23 King St.

W. Oshawa & Port Perry residents – please join the rally closest to you. We are trying to bring a message from all residents in the region to the Liberal government MPPs in our region to raise the questions and concerns outlined here.

the most impacted by cuts and rationing of services in mergers, and that there are few, if any, benefits from these mergers. We are questioning the costs and we are questioning the motives.

To date, the government has not answered for any of this.

In fact, a similar merger proposal was voted down just a few years ago by the government's own appointees in the regional health authority that plans and funds health care due to high costs.

the poorest neighbourhoods in Toronto, to replace them with one site over by Hwy 400. In fact, in 2014, the hospital CEO in Scarborough wrote a planning proposal to the government to close down one or two hospital sites and replace them with one. At the same time, the government continues to downsize the number of hospital beds and services. This is why we are concerned about the plans for Scarborough.

Having split the Ajax site from the Centenary site in Scarborough, the government then decided that rather than let Ajax-Pickering have their own hospital corporation, they would merge Ajax into Lakeridge Health. So Durham is paying the price for the government's political plans for Scarborough.

But the Ajax-Pickering hospital provides services to 200,000 people. Across Ontario there are many hospitals even in 100,000-person towns that stand alone. If anything, the small sites around them were merged into them. They do not get merged with equally-sized communities down the highway from them. It has not been clear from the beginning of this process why Durham has been roped into the merger deal that originated with the Scarborough hospitals (and that will result in service cuts in Scarborough also if the government does not step up and pay the costs).

Who We Are

The Ontario Health Coalition has existed for the last 30 years as a network of organizations and individuals committed to protecting public health care services for the people of Ontario. We are not political -- we do not support any political party and we do not tell people how to vote. Our mandate is to protect public health care under the principles of equity and compassion in the Canada Health Act. We were created as public watchdog to protect services, stop privatization, and ensure that democratic debate is upheld as an essential check-and-balance to policy-making regarding our health care and our health care services. As public hospital cuts have swept across Ontario over the last eight years, the Ontario Health Coalition has worked with local community groups to save local services. In recent months we saved the birthing services in Leamington, stopped the closure of birthing, the downgrading of the ICU, and bed and staff cuts in Midland, saved the emergency department on St. Joseph's Island near Sault Ste. Marie, and saved the emergency department in Wallaceburg.