



Expensive Ghost Ward Caps Taxpayer Boondoggle

A Bitter End



A magnificent, newly-completed Mental Health facility at Ajax/Pickering will never serve its taxpaying community

We fought them in the streets, in letters to the editor and in the community centre, but in the end the people who are granted the power in our hospitals used that power to close our mental health facilities at Ajax/Pickering. Patients formerly served by a superb team of dedicated nurses and doctors in our community are now told to seek help in Toronto, a half-hour's drive away. Support from family and friends takes on the added burden of an hour's round trip from Ajax to

Toronto (assuming you drive: public transit would make that about 3 hours), time that's pretty tough to spare on a weekday. But that's only the beginning.

There is a telling irony that while construction crews were putting finishing touches on a brand new mental health ward at Ajax/Pickering that will never be used, the patients who needed 3 West were scattered for miles around because work in the Scarborough Centenary ward, the grand vision of efficiency supposed to subsume 3 West in its wake had not been completed. Even now, neither Centenary's medical psychiatric unit nor its PICU are open. Twenty-five beds remain removed from the system, meaning patients remain scattered, or, reportedly, stacked into rooms beyond their capacity, and parked on beds outside nursing station windows when observation is required. All through this time the LHIN and RVAP board were busy congratulating themselves in the [News Advertiser](#). Surely this highlights where patients *really* stand with these bureaucracies.

If you get the chance, drop by the library and pick up a video entitled *Ajax: Town history, 1946-1976*. It's a McLean Hunter production (from back when there was one) that shows Ajax's progress following the war. When you watch the contrast between the enthusiastic spirit that built the Ajax/Pickering Hospital out of the old DIL first aid shack against today's bureaucratic, plunder-with-a-smile spirit controlling the Ajax/Pickering hospital today, it will break your heart. That bureaucratic spirit starts with the Ministry, and it won't change unless the provincial government believes it will cost a lot of votes. Your letters and those of your neighbours' to the politicians listed on page 2 are the only way to induce that belief. If you want the full service hospital that our community built for itself, please, pick up a pen or a keyboard and **write or send your letters!**

More Cuts to Our Services?

“Clinical Services Plan” Revealed February 17

At the Central East LHIN's next board meeting, the “Clinical Services Plan Steering Committee” will present a report to the Board of the Central East LHIN about “how hospitals across the Central East LHIN can improve the delivery of acute care hospital services based on the location of the patient population and support patient access to the best medical care, equipment and highly skilled providers.” In a letter to the Friends dated January

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Welcome

Welcome to the first edition of *Among Friends*, the newsletter of the Friends of Ajax/Pickering Hospital. Our aim is to provide the people of Ajax and Pickering an objective view of what's *really* happening with medical care in our community. The Friends of Ajax/Pickering Hospital are a volunteer organization. Without access to the PR budgets available to the hospital boards, the government's latest Local Health Care Integration Network bureaucracy (“LHIN”) and the Ministry of Health, we are reaching out using the email addresses of you, the members of our community, who have supported our previous fights to keep Obstetrics and the Mental Health wards in Ajax/Pickering. As a community it is important that we keep our friends and neighbours aware of what's happening to our local health care. After watching a hospital board spend over \$70 million without public accountability, after watching the LHIN ignore over 1,000 citizens, claiming “community consultation” means announcing decisions *fait accompli*, and after watching a flurry of positive press releases about the new hospital wing obscure the wasteful completion of a ward that will never be used, we don't believe the message that the Ajax/Pickering hospital is doing “just fine”. We need to keep a light shining on the activities of three levels of bureaucracy to protect the years of hard work of so many people in our community to build our local hospital. We need you to be part of that light, and hope you will help by forwarding this newsletter to your neighbours (or have us send them a copy), by staying watchful, and insisting your politicians do the same. It's your health care, and there's only one Ajax/Pickering hospital.

Open Forum: Questions for your Politicians

We are told that the people of Ajax/Pickering had to sacrifice promised services because our hospital is \$78 million in debt. Yet the recent and futile completion of the expensive new Mental Health Unit (see [here](#) for details) suggests that needed controls are still not in place, and that we'll be paying a bigger price in future. Now we discover that the medical psychiatric unit for which 3 West was sacrificed is still not open with no known time when that may happen. When the LHIN defines broadcasting their agenda to a screaming crowd "community consultation", and get the courts to agree, the only means to effect change is to convince politicians that your vote depends on real consultation and an end to transfers to Toronto.

- Why did the hospital pay for and install a ward that cannot be used for any purpose other than as a psychiatric medical facility when those services were removed from Ajax/Pickering?
- We were told that the closure of the Mental Health Ward was both part of a long term strategy and an emergency response to an unexplained \$78 million debt. Which is it?
- Is it true that police cannot bring Durham region patients in crisis to Scarborough Centenary because it's out of their jurisdiction, and that they bring these patients to almost any Durham region hospital except Ajax/Pickering?
- How did completing a now useless, single-purpose ward get factored into the original "deficit elimination plan"?
- How does Dr. Fishman claim to the Ajax News Advertiser that with the outpatient clinic now in a converted ambulance garage with massive heating, air conditioning and plumbing problems, that "closing the in-patient mental-health beds at Ajax would be more than offset by improved out-patient services"?
- Why is the "promised" 16 hours of emergency psychiatric service unstaffed so often as to effectively nullify it?
- Isn't it time Ajax/Pickering hospital be paired with a Durham, not a Toronto hospital?

In this space we're going to ask questions, and we encourage you to email or write the politicians (see below) with these questions and those that will appear here in future issues. Encourage your friends and neighbours to do the same. When you hear stories of waste of your health care taxes from the Rouge Valley system (Ajax/Pickering and Scarborough Centenary), please email them in confidence to friendsofaph@rogers.com. We'll ask the difficult questions right here for our community to ask our politicians. It's your health care and you paid for it, with your tax dollars and with your health care "premium". You're entitled to answers to the questions. If there was ever a place to shine a light, this is it!

Contacting the Politicians

MPP Ajax

Joe Dickson
Room 211,
Main Legislative Building,
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A4
jdickson.mpp@liberal.ola.org

MPP Pickering

Wayne Arthurs
Ministry of Finance
7th Floor,
Frost Building South
7 Queen's Park Crescent
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1Y7
warthurs.mpp@liberal.ola.org

Premier's Office

Hon Dalton McGuinty
Room 281,
Main Legislative Building,
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A1
dmcguinty.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org

Minister of Health

Hon. David Caplan
Ministry of Health and
Long-Term Care
10th Floor, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 2C4
dcaplan.mpp@liberal.ola.org

PC Health Care Critic

Elizabeth Witmer
Room 422, Main Legislative
Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A8
elizabeth.witmer@pc.ola.org

NDP Health Care Critic

France G elinas
Room 159, Main Legislative
Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A5
fgelinas-qp@ndp.on.ca

What Cuts May Come?

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17th, Foster Loucks, Chair of the Central East LHIN Board of Directors states "The Clinical Services Plan report will be for information only when it is presented to the Board of the Central East LHIN at its public meeting on February 17th. The implementation of any of the recommendations contained in the report may then come forward to the Central East LHIN Board in the future as integration opportunities and a process would be followed, as per the Local Health System Integration Act, to ensure that the appropriate community engagement has taken place prior to any integration opportunities being approved." Of course we've already seen what the LHIN considers "appropriate community engagement". Even the board meetings are structured only to allow public audience, which is very different from public input. You can chat with board members during breaks, but none of that is on the record, so it's not really "public input". Given the track record so far, the Friends are concerned that another local service will be sent to Scarborough (or further), perhaps with the same record demonstrated so shamefully with Mental Health.

The future of Ajax/Pickering hospital depends on citizens taking an active role. Although these meetings are scheduled during the day, if you can manage to attend at the HMS room of the Ajax Community Centre on the 17th from 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM, your presence does send a message that the people are watching.