



Among Friends

Newsletter of the Friends of Ajax/Pickering Hospital

Volume 1 Number 3

www.friendsofaph.ca

Fourth Quarter, 2009

Months of Healthcare Cynicism

A Matter of Public Trust

What a spectacle the last few months have been. Once again the trust we placed in our health care providers has been called into question in the wake of the multi-billion dollar eHealth scandal and the the swine flu vaccination fiasco. Closer to home, the *Friends* received a long-awaited reply from the board of the Rouge Valley Health System (RVHS) in response to our request for detailed accounting of the actual expenses for the closure of the mental health ward on 3 West, and, in light of major problems exposed by the Friends, whether the savings promised from that closure had in fact been achieved. As the copy of the letter (right) illustrates, the board, after a three month, three day deliberation period, informed us they do not believe that anyone outside the RVHS board is entitled to know how our tax dollars were spent.

Canadians instinctively rush to defend our healthcare system as a point of national pride. One of the unfortunate side effects of that defence is that too often it provides inappropriate cover for outrageous mistakes and a sense of entitlement within the ranks of those who administer that system. Canada's is the second most expensive universal healthcare system in the world (only Iceland's costs more *per capita*), yet we rank 26th of 28 nations in doctor-to-patient ratios. The money is being spent, but some, like those in charge of the eHealth fiasco, feel entitled to use it for purposes beyond healthcare. The attitude that "it's our money, not yours" that pervades the healthcare bureaucracy does not apparently drift far from the RVHS board.

When health care is publicly run, its administration becomes a public trust. Canada invests a larger public trust in its healthcare than any other western nation, in that our laws restrict a parallel, private health care network. Accordingly our public trust requires more than most that

the trustees operate in the best interests of the public, at least as well as the public would serve those interests themselves.

The public trust of Ajax/Pickering residents has been taken for granted during the move of the Mental Health facility to Toronto. The claim by the RVHS board that this was a critical component of several initiatives to save money flies in the face of the costs that the *Friends* believe have been incurred by the completion of previously-committed construction of the ward in Ajax/Pickering, and the ongoing

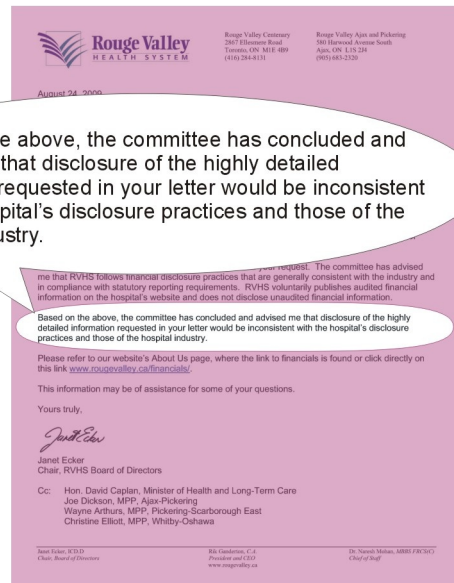
taken by the board themselves, not by an independent group. Town hall meetings have disappeared after the first vocal one against the move of the mental health ward, despite legislation requiring "community consultation". As part of a public health care network, the LHIN, ministry and board seem to be forgetting they report to the taxpayer, and we have a right to demand accountability.

With future consolidations earmarked but not laid out in the government's Clinical Services Plan, the public is now asked to place its trust in future moves of services among Ontario hospitals. If the *Friends* are suspicious, we have cause to be. The RVHS have ceded that what's good for Scarborough Centenary is good for Durham Region. Our experience over the Mental Health ward and with our efforts to get answers regarding the Clinical Services Plan demonstrates otherwise. It is clear now that the mental health ward's move to Scarborough was an ill-conceived and ill-planned move designed to solve the political issue of creating a test case for consolidation of services now emerging more fully in the Clinical Services Plan. The public have a right to answers before that plan proceeds further.

Public trust requires requires at a minimum an independent measure of the results of the public delivery. It requires *genuine* consultation with the community whose trust is sought. It requires opportunity for review that ensures the funds placed under public trust are used to pay for services, not for concealment of mistakes or wrongdoing. It requires action that reflects these requirements, rather than mere lip service to them.

Since the founding of the Ajax/Pickering hospital, our community has recognized both the need for local care and the need to resist the assumption that what's good for Toronto is good for Durham region. Those who seek our community trust should be achieving that goal. Durham taxpayers deserve no less.

Based on the above, the committee has concluded and advised me that disclosure of the highly detailed information requested in your letter would be inconsistent with the hospital's disclosure practices and those of the hospital industry.



costs expected to complete necessary changes remaining in the Scarborough facility. The *Friends* sought an appropriate accounting of these costs so that the Durham taxpayers would be able to judge for themselves whether the "savings" that cost them their local mental health ward were actually realized. The violation of public trust stems from the refusal of the RVHS board to share those costs with those of us who are footing the bill.

This reflects arrogance of entitlement, not the humility of accepted trust. When the *Friends* reported alarming conditions at the Scarborough Mental Health ward, the "audit" of the problems was under-

Changing Government Health Care Starts Here

Do you think your healthcare system in Durham Region will deliver better or worse care in two years' time? In ten years' time? A public healthcare system responds to public, political action. Ensuring Durham region receives the quality of care envisioned when the Ajax/Pickering hospital was founded depends on citizens demanding that quality from their politicians. Your help is needed. Send a letter or email to the politicians listed below, complaining about the high-handed, secretive processes that threaten continued extraction of needed care to a wasteful system offering declining quality. It won't change without you.

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MPP Whitby-Oshawa

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Premier's Office

Hon Dalton McGuinty
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Minister of Health

Hon. Deb Matthews
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PC Health Care Critic

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The Friends of Ajax/Pickering Hospital is a group of concerned citizens, doctors, nurses, other health care providers, business officials, and patients who support the continued presence of Ajax/Pickering Hospital as the major hospital to fully service all present and future health needs of rapidly growing West Durham region.