

ENSURING TAX DOLLARS ARE SPENT WISELY FOR THE BETTERMENT OF THE TOWN

OCTOBER 2009 NEWSLETTER

Summer is now over but we have enjoyed all activities, despite a cooler and wetter summer. September was beautiful and presented a perfect end to the season. The SRA has been working on a number of important issues which have a large impact on our community.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Thank you to all those people who have renewed their membership and all the new members. Your support is essential to the effectiveness of the association. **This is the final appeal to those who have yet to renew.** We want to see you back as members and encourage you to send in your application forms with a cheque as soon as possible. Forms can be copied off our web site www.southamptonontario.org. **Unfortunately, we cannot continue to send non members future newsletters or provide cottage patrols starting October 1st until you rejoin.**

SOUTHAMPTON HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM COVERAGE

As most of you are aware, the Provincial Government has informed the Hospital, that according to their protocols, Saugeen Shores now has enough doctors to provide 24/7 Emergency Room coverage. The Province, through Health Force Ontario Market and Recruitment Agency has been supplying temporary doctors since 2006 to augment ER coverage as we, like many other areas, were short of family doctors. There are many factors that make it difficult for our present group of hard working family doctors to provide coverage in ER 24/7. These include contractual arrangements, family situations, lack of emergency room training and experience, specialization, summer work load to name a few. Ken Robertson as President wrote to all the parties involved and a copy of his letter was released to the press. It covers the concerns we all share on a possible reduction in coverage and suggests a possible pathway to overcoming the crisis. A condensed (smaller print!) version is well worthwhile repeating.

Mr. Craig Curran
Chair

Board of Directors
Grey Bruce Health Services

August 11, 2009

Copies: CEO Maureen Solecki
Mayor Mike Smith

MPP Carol Mitchell
MP Ben Lobb

Re: **Reduction of Hours of Service in ER at Southampton Hospital**

Dear Sir:

My name is Ken Robertson and I am currently the President of the 400 member Southampton Residents Association (SRA). This correspondence is being submitted in response to the pending announcement of a reduction in the hours of service at the Southampton Emergency Room.

Permit me at the outset to refer to the Mission, Values and Strategic Goals for the Grey Bruce Health Services, they are very relevant to our submissions. Your mission statement contains the statement, "*Patient Care is Our Focus.*" One of your core values is, "*Continuous improvement,*" and one of your, key strategic goals is, "*appropriate access for patients to our health care system is a priority.*"

Quality organizations, which we know you are and that you continue to strive to be, use their mission, values and strategic objectives as a beacon to guide their decision making. This helps them ensure they are making the right decision for their clients and their employees.

Reducing the hours of service in the Emergency Room in Southampton is contrary to your Mission, Values and Strategic Goals. It does not address the health concerns of the citizens and visitors to Saugeen Shores as well as the Physicians and Staff who provide these services. The reduction in hours at this facility represents an unacceptable public safety risk to citizens and visitors who may require emergency services during this time. Two examples would include a victim of a stroke having treatment delayed during the critical half hour following their stroke or accident victims requiring immediate treatment for trauma to save their lives. Instead of being stabilized in our ER, they may face permanent debilitating brain damage or death as a result of the delay in access to emergency service traveling to Owen Sound or elsewhere. This problem becomes even more acute when we are confronted with winter driving conditions.

A demographic analysis of the current population in Saugeen Shores would reveal a significant growth in senior citizens as our community is becoming a destination for retirees from across Ontario, this trend will continue as more of the Baby Boomer Generation reach retirement age. One can only imagine the shouts of protest if this kind of announcement was made in retirement communities to the south of us.

The Bruce Nuclear Project requires a significant number of professionals and skilled workers, many of those workers and their families reside in Saugeen Shores. Part of our success in attracting these families to Saugeen Shores has been the Services provided by the Southampton Hospital.

There has been a significant level of community dialogue, press coverage, political meetings, stakeholder meetings and public frustration during the past month. This communication is not intended to point fingers of blame. We recognize the fact our Physicians are working above and beyond to provide the best service they can. We acknowledge the work of the Physician Recruitment Committee to fill the void in badly needed Family Physicians for our community. We appreciate the fact the Provincial Government has provided emergency room coverage through Health Force Ontario for 145 shifts during the last year.

We acknowledge there may be circumstances that compound this problem that are confidential in nature. Regardless, we have learned that while we may be near the provincial standard for the number of family physicians for a community of our size, the problem with Emergency Room coverage continues to grow. In hindsight it may have been preferable not to enter into contractual relationships with some doctors that exempt them from work in the ER, while others are overworked, or are unable to take on the added responsibility of emergency services.

The reality is, this reduction of hours in the ER may prove to be the thin edge of the wedge in an overall reduction in Services in Health Care for our community. The provincial government has set up the Ontario Rural and Northern Ontario Health Care Panel to review the needs of communities like ours. The time delay in implementation of their recommendations will do nothing to address the immediate safety concerns of citizens. Our Association is requesting a timely implementation of an action plan to address our concerns. The results of these planning sessions may prove to be a catalyst for the provincial Ministry of Health.

Action Plan

1. In the short term, the Provincial Government is requested to provide appropriate funding and resources from Health Force Ontario to ensure there is no reduction in Emergency Service at the Southampton Hospital until the staffing problem is resolved.

2. The Board of Directors of the Grey Bruce Health Services is asked to coordinate a Community Health Care Planning Session to develop a plan that will address the short and long term health care needs for citizens and the concerns of service providers in Saugeen Shores.
3. This comprehensive plan should include: a needs analysis of community health care over the next 3, 5, and 10 years, a demographic analysis of our community, a physician recruitment strategic plan, and financial plan for health care services for Saugeen Shores.
4. The planning session should be a joint effort which includes: local elected officials, Federal and Provincial Members of Parliament, Provincial Ministry of Health, Business members, physicians, nurses and of course citizen representatives. The Grey Bruce Health Services Board would lead and provide facilitation services for these sessions.

During my 36 year career in public safety I learned the importance of listening to the concerns of our citizens; it helps save lives and improves the quality of public services. In this case the health and safety of citizens and visitors in Saugeen Shores are at stake, it is important that this action plan be implemented immediately to prevent a tragic and unnecessary loss of life in our community.

I look forward to hearing from you, I am willing to assist in any way I can. Some of our Board members, who have extensive experience and years of service on hospital boards, have also volunteered to assist as well.

Yours truly,

Kenneth Robertson, President: Southampton Residents Association

Meetings have also been held with Mayor Mike Smith, Chair of Grey Bruce Health Services Board-Brian Curran, Hospital, CEO-Maureen Solecki and the Southwest LHIN. We have also contacted the Port Elgin Beaches Association and the Saugeen Cottage Owners Incorporated who both are supporting our efforts. We are waiting to hear a date for our meeting with MPP Carol Mitchell to discuss this and other SRA issues. She is a member of the panel set up by the Province to review and make recommendations on Northern Ontario and Rural Health Care. She was recently appointed Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Health and Long Term Care.

We feel that these efforts and similar efforts by others have raised the awareness in the community. The Provincial Government is now in the process of approving six month's extension 24/7 ER coverage with support from Health Force Ontario for extra doctors. Bruce Power's Duncan Hawthorne has announced \$500,000 financial support for a fulltime doctor recruiter in Saugeen Shores and Kincardine. This also illustrates the concerns our major employer has about reduction of emergency services for its operations and well being of its employees. The plan involves hiring additional doctors to help cover ER. Six months is a short timeframe to do this and we still need to remain vigilant as the problem has not been solved long term. It is encouraging that Grey Bruce Health Services Board, MPP Carol Mitchell, Mayor Smith, Saugeen Council, our physician recruitment committee and our local physicians are all working hard together to resolve this crisis.

OTHER SRA ACTIVITIES

The SRA Golf Tournament held on August 6th was a great success and we thank everyone for their support. Over \$5000 was raised and as planned, we donated \$3000 of the proceeds towards an integrated accessible playground for handicapped children at Jubilee Park. The SRA has also made a commitment to Streetscape for two period lights for High St covered by proceeds from previous golf tournaments.

The AGM was held on July 25th and was well attended. The Mayor, Southampton councilors and the Police Chief were in attendance. Dale Robinette stepped down from the Board and we all thank her for the many contributions she has made to the SRA and its predecessors over the years. Jim Henning was elected to the Board. Ken Robertson was elected President, Lorne Shantz and Mike Sterling as Vice Presidents and Ken Harlock as Treasurer. Rod McLeod is now Past President and we owe him a huge debt of gratitude for the work he has done over the last eight years as President.

The SRA is continuing to pursue several objectives designed to improve the quality of life in Southampton. This includes reintroduction of water quality testing on our beaches, the development of a dunes management policy and public safety concerns on Highway 21 at HiBerry's and the Sauble Beach intersection. Updates will be provided in future issues of our newsletter.

OTHER TOWN AND COUNCIL HAPPENINGS

A contract has been let to upgrade High St from Albert to Victoria and work will commence in the fall. It involves replacement of the water main and minor drainage improvements as well as conduits for the option of putting power lines underground. Ducts for the period lighting are also in the plan. The Town is talking to the Streetscape committee about other aspects, including more green space as against concrete. The asphalt on the road will be replaced. The Town is open to any comments and suggestions the residents may want to raise. Contact Dave Burnside at the Town office or one of our councilors.

The environmental study for the proposed sewers on the North Shore has been completed. There is a 30 day grace period for anyone to submit objections to the findings. If there are none, it will go to Council. The detailed engineering study is underway and will determine the actual cost and scope of the work proposed. The third and final stage of studies for a new pool is underway, including assessment of capital, operating costs and possible sources of funding. The consultant's report is due in late October or November and will go to Council. These are two very large projects and if they proceed, will greatly increase the debt levels of the Town.

Long time Chief Administrative Officer, Ron Brown has retired and we all wish him well. The new CAO is Lawrence Allison who has extensive experience in municipal administration.

The Olympic Torch run is scheduled to pass through Port Elgin and Southampton on December 28th on its way to Owen Sound and Vancouver. Check the Town web site and the press for final arrangements as these things tend to change. Let's hope we don't have a major snow storm on that day!

Schendel & Sullivan has been sold and the new owners are Lane McMeeken and Lindsay George. They are keen to continue the store's tradition and try out a few new ideas and products. We all wish them continued success.

Tim Andersen for the Board

October, 2009