



UPDATED ACTION PLAN

November 13, 2023

Introduction

Once again, and as always, we appreciate the opportunity to bring you our update and discuss upcoming activities during the fall and winter months. The situation concerning reduced hours and service closures at the Chesley Hospital is substantially unchanged and although we know that the CEO and the Board of the South Bruce Grey Hospital Centre deny there is a threat to the future of our local hospital, we have not seen the type of service and staffing adjustments that would support that view. Our committee continues to advocate for the resumption of 24/7 ER service at Chesley District Memorial Hospital. One year ago, on November 10th, 2022, Meghan Legge, Communications Officer for the SBGHC, released a letter confirming, as we all knew, that the Chesley ER had been closed completely since October 6th, and that it would resume weekday service only on December 5th. Together we have just passed a significant anniversary...one year since the release of this information. During that time, we have all joined forces to call for Ministry of Health attention to this issue. Our mayor, and the mayors of Durham and Walkerton, joined forces to request a meeting with the Premier and Minister of Health to discuss this situation. To date we are not aware that such a meeting has taken place or been offered. With some intermittent closures, the hospitals in Durham and Walkerton have returned to full time ER service. Chesley has not. We have also had an unsuccessful result with the petition we had taken to Queen's Park and would like to discuss our thoughts on that matter this morning. Our committee continues to operate with enthusiasm for the task and we are prepared to continue the struggle. We are not going away.



Our Emergency Departments
are open.

SBGHC Chesley Monday-Friday 7:00 AM-5:00 PM
SBGHC Durham, SBGHC Kincardine, SBGHC Walkerton 24/7

The attached screenshot from the SBGHC website on Friday illustrates the issue. The announcement that the ER's are all open is qualified by mention of 24/7 service in Durham, Kincardine, and Walkerton with a disclaimer stating Chesley is only open daytimes during the week. It seems the status quo of reduced service for our hospital and our community has become the norm.

Recent History

Following the success of our rally on April 1st, we have learned that many small rural hospitals in the province are suffering ER closures and/or budgetary challenges on a regular basis. Recognizing that we gain strength in numbers we have helped to form the Grey Bruce Health Coalition, a local affiliate of the Ontario Health Coalition. This gives us a louder voice and important contacts throughout the area and the province to help amplify our message. Our committee continues to look into plans for joint ventures with the Coalition as well as local activities to keep our message strong.

In September we were involved in planning a Mass Protest/Rally at Queen's Park on September 25th. 10,000 people came to this peaceful rally to show support for public health care in our province, to reject private health care, and to send notice to the current government that outstanding issues in the Healthcare portfolio need to be addressed urgently. 85 buses brought people to Queen's Park from all over the province. Chesley was very well represented and from Grey Bruce we had a total of 50 supporters. We had an opportunity to speak to the assembly about our small rural hospital and we received good media coverage.

From March to early May we circulated a petition within the Arran Elderslie community. The petition is attached to this document. We gathered 1,282 signatures. In particular, the petition requested attention to this important issue in our community and asked that the Premier and Minister of Health respond to this Council's letter of October 31, 2022. Our local MPP refused to present our petition to the legislature and with the assistance of the Ontario Health Coalition, arrangements were made for both the Liberal and NDP parties to read it into the record. On May 18th, Deputy Mayor Jennifer Shaw accompanied us to Queen's Park for the official reading of our petition.

The Premier and Minister of Health had 24 sitting days in the legislature to provide a response to our petition. Allowing for summer adjournment of the legislature and other interruptions of that body, we were advised by the Office of the Clerk that the deadline date had been adjusted and we should expect a response by October 30th. We did not receive a copy ourselves but within the week I was able to request and receive a copy of the response from the Office of the Clerk. I commend the level of attention and service this office has shown in assisting us.

I have attached the petition and the response to this submission and would like to seek feedback from Council before our Committee decides on next actions. We will be meeting on November 14th, and this will be on our agenda. It is my opinion that the response is

unacceptable. It is a form letter that does not even mention Chesley, Arran Elderslie, or our previous correspondence and petition. In fact, at the top of the page, someone has pencilled in the number of our petition so we can assume other petitions may have received the exact same form. I have advised the Office of the Clerk that I am not satisfied with this letter and will be consulting with other parties on a method of response.

Current Action Plans

It is important that we keep the message about our hospital in the public eye. In doing so we support local residents who feel that the status quo is not acceptable for our hospital and also help them to understand that our committee and this Council are working hard to address this situation. Strong communication is the word of the day.

We have yet to determine what we can do locally this fall and winter to continue to bring attention to this matter. At one point we had suggested that we could work together to organize a community meeting on October 7th, the anniversary of the closure of our ER. That did not receive support at the time but perhaps we could now suggest holding another meeting or rally on this issue for residents of the community. We could work on a list of speakers for the event and then have an open mike situation for people to participate in the discussion. It seems time to give the average resident a voice and an opportunity to speak to this issue.

Together with the Ontario Health Coalition we have plans for some other activities as well. On November 28th we are holding a Day of Action at Queen's Park for Small, Rural, and Local hospitals. Leaders from local areas throughout the province will attend Question Period and hold a press conference during which we will release a report with updated information concerning the challenges to these hospitals. As Chair of the Small, Rural and Local Hospital Committee I will be in attendance and able to, once again, address the issue as it affects Chesley. In preparation, we would like to meet with local representatives from Council to discuss and update our information.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has recently produced a report entitled, "At What Cost? Ontario Hospital Privatization and the Threat to Public Health Care". Written by Andrew Longhurst, it frankly discusses the disadvantages of the move to private health care in the province and the impacts this has on the health care system, including small and rural hospitals. The report is lengthy and available online; I have attached a short summary produced by the OHC. At the present time, a panel is travelling to 10 different cities in the province, holding meetings and conferences to discuss these findings. Although it does not address Chesley directly, this report is a catalyst for discussion about the cancellation or

alteration of hospital services within the province. We are not directly involved in this tour but have called attention to it in our communications.

In 2010, at a time when there were other impending hospital service reductions, including ER's, the OHC produced a report entitled, "Toward Equality and Access: Realigning Ontario's Approach to Small and Rural Hospitals to Serve Public Values". That report became part of the discussion in saving many local hospital services, including ER's. After 13 years, facing similar service threats, we will be producing another such report with updated current information. Throughout the winter months we intend to hold hearings in a number of communities throughout the province moderated by a panel including representatives from each of the political parties, union representatives for nurses, physicians and other experts, Natalie Mehra, Chair of the OHC, and myself as chair of the Small, Rural, and Local Hospital Committee for Ontario accepting submissions from local community leaders, including mayors and councillors, local health care workers, Board members, and other interested parties. At the conclusion of the hearings in late March, the group will produce a current report on the issue of Small and Rural Hospital Services and this leads to two questions:

- 1) Would Chesley like to put in a request to host one of these meetings?
- 2) Would the mayor, and or other Councillors, care to present a submission to the panel?

Thank you for your attention to these suggestions and comments. We appreciate the commitment of this Council to pursuing a successful solution to the issue of the Chesley Hospital.

