

Comment

Grimsby's outrage is understandable

HHS leadership dropped the ball with temporary obstetrics relocation plan



Opinion

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The leadership at Hamilton Health Sciences needs to give their heads a shake if they thought they were going to get away with moving services from West Lincoln Memorial Hospital in Grimsby without the community crying out.

It really hit the fan when chief of staff at WLMH, Dr. Gary Benson, resigned in protest, saying he was blindsided by the decision. Protests came from both the community and hospital staff. The way this process has unfolded leaves no one happy.

How is it that the chief of staff at WLMH could be blindsided by such a decision? What does this say about the leadership competencies of Hamilton Health Sciences? What kind of tactic is it to disregard colleagues in such a public manner over such a huge decision? Why was Dr. Benson's buy-in not sought before pitching the proposal to HHS in a unified deal? And if they knew he'd bolt, then why wasn't a different way forward found with his expertise and input? Putting the community through this turmoil is the antithesis of good leadership. What were they all thinking?

Did HHS leadership not consider that the community would be outraged at this decision? Or is that part

of the plan: create the outrage, get the attention of the province, demand funding? Is this all just politics? This will be the test of Niagara West MPP Sam Oosterhoff's career. A solution amenable to the community would certainly satisfy those detractors who scoff at his inexperience and would guarantee him years of loyal supporters. And a failure will remain an indelible black mark to be remembered at the next election.

My grandson was born at WLMH two years ago. My daughter had a wonderful experience. That's high praise in the world of hospital maternity care. Word on the local street among expectant moms is WLMH is the place to deliver for its small-time feel and excellent care. Her first child was born at St. Joe's. It was a different experience, for many reasons, but the one that serves this discussion is that dad was far away, in Grimsby.

Grimsby families will be faraway from their loved ones in need. The families of new babies will have to go further to support the new moms and visit their new family member. Family and friends of people undergoing surgery will need to go further to support their family and friends. These supports are important; everything positive contributes to a better surgical outcome. Adding the stress of further travel time does not help the experience. The alternative of public transit between Grimsby and either St. Catharines or Hamilton through the GO system is wholly inadequate at present from Grimsby to either of these centres without it

adding hours to the trip.

There's no surprise WLMH needs investment. It's an old building, it needs repair; it probably needs to be replaced altogether. The need to accommodate advances in health-care processes are also driving this decision, but the standard of care for the Grimsby community is not compromised under current conditions. But by closing these services, obstetrics and surgery, it will be.

It makes no difference that the proposal is only temporary, that the promise is that these services will come back. Perhaps that's the greatest insult. That this upheaval is deemed acceptable signals an out-of-touch air surrounds HHS decision-makers.

If these services are needed in the community, they're needed in the community, now, and during the construction of a new hospital.

And they are needed. Grimsby is one of the fastest growing communities in the Niagara Region. It's a beautiful town, close to the lake and escarpment and via the Queen Elizabeth to everywhere; people have been flocking to Grimsby to nest. For new families in Grimsby, are moms now expected to leave their community to give birth? The hospital probably pulled them to Grimsby in the first place. Of course, they're outraged.

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