

## INTRO ARTICLE

Essex County is unique in many ways. Access to timely and proper medical care by our residents has been an increasing problem over the last many years. Unfortunately, the problems seem to be ever increasing with no end in sight.

The federal governments' recent acceptance of the Romanow report promises increasing funds to Canada for improving our health care but doctors in Essex County are not getting too excited about any significant change for the better in the foreseeable future. How Ontario's increased health budget will be allocated is not yet decided. It seems everyone has their own opinion as to which issue has priority – how to split the pie. There is no argument from anyone that improvements are required.

Health care reform is an issue for all of the provincial political parties and their particular approaches to improving our system will be made clear, as the Provincial Election gets closer.

Essex County has a severe shortage of medical manpower including nurses (hospital and home care), technologists, lab, x-ray personnel as well as physicians. According to predictions from the Ontario Medical Association – this is expected to worsen, not improve, in the next ten years.

The Essex County Medical Society (ECMS) was first established in 1870 and is still going strong today. It represents the majority of physicians of Essex County, and as such, is responsible for addressing not only the concerns of our physicians but also those of the public that we serve. It provides an organization to discuss and form strategies for the multiple health/physician related issues that are present in our area. Issues for physicians in Essex County are usually much different than those of London, Hamilton and Toronto. Essex (represented by ECMS), Kent and Lambton Counties comprise of District 1 in the Ontario Medical Association. Our representatives have direct input into OMA policy and its' interaction with the government of Ontario.

The ECMS is one of the most active branch Societies of the OMA and has won the T C Routley Challenge Shield Award (best branch society) numerous times – more than any other branch society. Dr. Albert Schumacher (family physician) was a recent president of the OMA and is a current candidate for president of the Canadian Medical Association. Dr. Deborah Hellyer (respirologist) is a current executive board member of the OMA. Direct OMA input also involves Dr. Hiren Desai (neurologist), Dr. Gregory Flynn (pathologist), Dr. Albert Ng (family practice), Dr. Rajan Chetty (cardiologist), Dr. H. Adams (plastic surgeon) and Dr. David Paterson (family practice/emergency room). We are not isolated down in this corner of Ontario, and our voices are listened to.

Because of expected increasing difficulties in accessing health care in the near future, it was suggested that "ECMS Forum" be published regularly in the Windsor Star. With the help of Wayne Moriarty (editor) and Veronique Mandal (medical reporter) it is our hope to address most of the issues, from a local physician point of view, that are of concern to

residents in Essex County. Initial articles will address such issues as waits in the Emergency Room, differences between family practice and walk-in clinics, why our area has such a chronic physician shortage, long waits for specialist consultations, surgical procedures and various investigations.

If the public is interested in maintaining the “FORUM” we plan to have various ECMS member physicians answer submitted questions from Windsor Star Readers. Articles would represent the view of the responding physician. It is expected that medical as well as political, financial and social issues will be involved.

Other issues that we plan to address include – why Windsor should have an angioplasty unit, physicians perspective on West Nile Virus, SARS, how our new satellite medical school will affect us, new pediatric vaccines, stress related issues, doctor notes for work absence, nurse practitioners, medical issues affecting the county, Kingsville, Leamington residents, prevalence of certain illness in Essex County, history and interesting facts about the ECMS, experiences of the team physician at recent world junior hockey championship, access to prenatal care, issues of mental illness, diabetes, hypertension, geriatrics, home care and many more.

The first series of articles will discuss issues relating to primary care in Essex County. Topics of timely interest as well as responses to readers’ questions will also be included. This is a new venture for the Doctors of the ECMS. Each article is the opinion of the particular physician who wrote the article and does not necessarily represent the views of the OMA or of other members of the ECMS.

It is our hope that such a column will not only inform readers about their doctor’s perspectives on issues of concern, but may also help physicians to better understand the needs of the community we serve. This could develop into better and more efficient delivery of some of the health care needs of our community.

David Paterson, M.D.