



## Hospital last to call for total smoke ban

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Smoking is becoming a thing of the past for two of the three hospitals in York Region, but officials say there is no peer pressure for the last remaining facility, which is here in Markham, to butt out at this time.

Since the Smoke Free Ontario Act took effect in 2006, smoking has been banned in all enclosed workplaces and enclosed public places across the province.

Last August, York Central Hospital in Richmond Hill took a step further and implemented a total smoking ban on its property. Its effort to eliminate the effect of first- and second-hand smoke will be followed next week by the Southlake Regional Health Centre in Newmarket, which kicks off its total ban April 1.

While officials at Markham Stouffville Hospital recognize their colleagues for having made an informed decision based on their physical facilities and patient population, said Julia Scott, vice-president of clinical programs and chief nursing executive, "we haven't been feeling any pressure in this area. Our policy is in keeping with the Smoke Free Ontario Act, and at this point we do not plan to change our policy."

No smoking is allowed within the Markham Stouffville Hospital or within nine metres of any hospital doorway, including all patient, public and staff entrances. As well, staff, physicians and volunteers are not permitted to smoke in public areas where they may be visible to patients or visitors. The hospital has a designated smoking shelter.

"We think that our policy is just fine right now, and we would also be concerned about the impact a total smoking ban would have on patients, particularly those that aren't able to leave the hospital premises, for example, mental health patients," Ms Scott said.

"We absolutely encourage our staff and our patients not to smoke. We've held sessions on cutting out smoking and that kind of things. We continue to evaluate our policies on a regular basis, but at this point, we think it's working, it's working for us, and it's working for our patients and our staff."

Dr. Larry Grossman is the chief of staff at the York Central Hospital. He recalled the total smoking ban as being "controversial" prior to its taking effect at the hospital last year, but says the policy has worked out well for them.

"I can tell you that members of our board felt there would be a lot of backlashes from both the patients and the public, and if this was the right thing to do," he said.

"But to the credit of the people that put this policy in place, we went through a period of six months preparing staff, preparing patients, giving them the data and all the options they could explore, so by the time it was instituted, everybody was really well prepared for this. That's why it was so seamless."

In fact, Mr. Grossman said he has not had one complaint from patients regarding the ban,

and said several staff members have cut down on smoking, including one "inveterate smoker" who quit.

"I don't think there's anybody in their right mind that would question the relationship between smoking and a variety of illnesses, whether it's first-hand smoke or second-hand smoke," he said. "It's inconceivable to me that somebody working in or being part of a hospital environment would do something that we know is unhealthy and contributing to the significant burden of illness in the community."

That being said, Mr. Grossman conceded that those who want to smoke will still find a way to do so at their own discretion.

"I'm not going to deny the fact that if you walk in front of the hospital there will be often one or two people standing on the sidewalk outside the hospital smoking," he said.

"The hospital also backs onto a conservation area, and there's a driveway that separates the hospital from the conservation area. If you drive back there, there's not infrequently one or two people standing on the curb and smoking."

Still, Mr. Grossman said staff have been uniformly supportive. "We just felt that from our patients' perspective, we wanted to show them that this is something they have to seriously consider in terms of changing their lifestyle."

But would he recommend the total ban to the Markham Stouffville Hospital? "I think they will have to form their own opinion," he said.