

Grace's future subject of debate

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Dr. Hugh Scott spent a lot of time Thursday night trying to ease concerns about the future of The Scarborough Hospital, Grace Division at a community meeting in the basement of St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Church on Finch Avenue.

And even though he had the support of MPP Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt), Scott was fighting an uphill battle when it came to convincing the residents and doctors in attendance that there wasn't "a hidden agenda"; at work to gut services at the Grace while increasing them at TSH's General Division.

The meeting was hosted by MP Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough-Agincourt), and he should be commended for giving Scott an opportunity to publicly address the rumours flying around the community about the Grace and healthcare services in northwest Scarborough. What has been clear for a long time is that staffers at the Grace, and community members, are worried about their hospital's future and they seem extremely suspicious of TSH's board and the Ontario Ministry of Health.

Yet, there was Scott on Thursday night spelling it out in language that couldn't have been any clearer: "There is no plot, there is no hidden agenda. There is no shrinkage"; of health services planned for Scarborough.

Yet, the doctors continued to raise concerns about rumoured closures of the Grace's obstetrics, pediatrics, emergency and palliative care departments.

Not surprisingly, these rumours are having a terrible impact on morale at the hospital. There is enormous uncertainty and staffers are leaving because of it.

So, even though Scott and Phillips may insist the future of the Grace is secure, the reality is that people who work there and the people who live in the community served by the hospital don't believe it.

And that's a bad situation for everyone.

The doctors say the only way to improve morale at the Grace, and keep staff, is to make a real and substantial investment in the hospital.

Yet, that seems to be the one thing that can't be committed to and Phillips made it clear the province isn't going to just "pour money"; into the hospital.

Scott also told Thursday's meeting that the province wants to know it is getting the maximum out of healthcare services, and it is not realistic to have certain services being duplicated at both the Grace and General divisions. Healthcare has to be shaped to efficiently serve the future needs of the Scarborough community, he pointed out.

This is a complicated issue, and there seems to be a lot of forces at work in it including no small amount of political self-promotion by some individuals on the periphery of this debate.

For now, though, both the local MPP and the hospital's CEO are on the record that the Grace is not closing. That should be worth a lot, but unfortunately it doesn't seem to be carrying much value with the

staffers and residents who believe the hospital is doomed.

"Words are cheap," said Dr. Mary Cheng after confronting Phillips on the issue at a post-provincial budget breakfast hosted by the Scarborough Board of Trade recently. "We need to see real action."