

Paid Parking Press Release – Sept 10th, 2010

As everyone knows, the Province of Ontario is experiencing unprecedented financial challenges. We feel the pressure at St. Francis Memorial Hospital (SFMH) in that our Ministry of Health and Long Term Care's (MoHLTC) funding allocation this year was less than 1.5%. At the same time, our expenses are growing in the range of 7 to 8%. As such, like all hospitals, we have been forced to look for new revenue streams. SFMH must implement the first step of the MoHLTC budget requirements and introduce paid parking commencing November 1, 2010.

SFMH was one of the last of 168 hospitals in Ontario to still offer free parking.

Jeremy Stevenson, Chief Operating Officer, points out that with costs for snow removal, line painting, salting, sanding, paving, taxes etc. exceeding \$20,000 per year, funds raised through paid parking will help offset these costs and ensure that we have more money for other services.

“That is money in our budget that we do not have available for direct patient care,” he says. “By establishing an affordable fee for parking, we can cover those costs and provide our hospital with some extra health care dollars.”

While the hospital receives phenomenal financial support from the local community to the Hospital Foundation for equipment, SFMH is facing difficult challenges in meeting its day-to-day operating costs. Many of these costs are beyond the hospitals' control and continue to increase at a higher rate than government funding. Charging for parking on all of the hospital and Health Centre property will help to minimize job cuts and service reductions.

“Paid parking is no longer something we can avoid in smaller communities,” says St. Francis Memorial Hospital CEO Randy Penney. “It's a revenue stream that we require in order to maintain quality health care close to home. The bottom line is that SFMH can no longer afford to ignore this revenue stream and pay out of pocket to provide free parking. Money that is spent on maintaining our parking lots is money that is not available for patient care.

“This is a situation, where if everyone participates and contributes, we will all gain with maintaining core services,” says Penney. “This is a necessary step to maintain such important services as the local emergency department and primary health care St. Francis provides.”

Hospital staff, Physicians and Health Centre staff will also be required to pay for parking. Well over half of the projected parking revenue will come from these groups. “Staff have told us that they will do whatever they can to save jobs and maintain the high quality of care they are able to provide” says Stevenson. “We have made every effort to introduce an affordable parking system that will be convenient for visitors and effective in helping us meet our financial needs.”

Currently, 97% of all Ontario Hospitals charge for parking with fees that can range from \$2 to \$20 per visit. Those who visit SFMH will be able to purchase parking tokens for \$2 each visit. Tokens will be available for purchase inside the hospital and clinic buildings and are deposited in the machine beside the gates when exiting.

“Please be assured that this decision has not been made lightly”, Jasna Boyd, Chair of the Board noted. “Senior administration and the Board Directors have carefully considered all options during their deliberations about this issue. SFMH is committed to maintaining the highest level of quality care, and we are doing everything in our power to maintain services in this very tough economic climate. In the final analysis, St. Francis remains a very strong and dynamic rural health facility.”

Q. How will the new paid parking system work?

A. Everyone can enter the lots at any time. A token will be required to open the gates when leaving. Staff who choose to participate in the prepaid plan will have their badges programmed to open the parking gates. Visitors and those who do not have pre-paid passes will purchase a token from one of two token machines that will be installed in the clinic and hospital.

Q. How was this system chosen?

A. A committee of staff (including union, physician and management reps) along with reps from the MV Township, Public School, Auxiliary, Renfrew Victoria Hospital, Health Centre and SFMH Foundation has been studying the various options and implications of paid parking for some time. Considerations included installation and maintenance costs, flexibility to serve the needs of various users, managing the lay-out of the lots, and convenience. Parking gates were chosen over the “pay and display” system many other hospitals use for convenience and ease of operation for all.

Q. How do the proposed rates compare to other hospitals?

There are only 5 out of 168 hospitals in Ontario that are currently not charging for parking. After reviewing other hospitals’ rates, we have chosen the lowest rate. While the rates will cover costs, generate a reasonable amount of revenue, they will still be affordable to our staff and community.

Q. What will this mean for the hospital budget?

A. We expect payment for parking to generate approximately \$50,000 a year. This revenue will play a critical role in balancing our operating budgets in the years to come. All funds raised from parking fees will be directed back into parking lot upkeep, saving jobs and maintaining health care services for our community.