



Abortion Rights
Coalition of Canada

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For immediate release

July 23, 2007

Community Rises Up Against Catholic Hospital Merger that Would End Reproductive Health Services

TORONTO — A community is up in arms after two neighbouring hospital boards voted in June to amalgamate the secular Huronia District Hospital in Midland Ontario, and the neighbouring Roman Catholic Penetanguishene General Hospital. The merger would end several essential health services, including abortions, vasectomies, tubal ligations, and birth control options. The proposed merger, which has yet to be voted on by the hospital membership, was recommended mostly for economic reasons, as Huronia suffers from a \$5 million dollar deficit while the Catholic hospital has a surplus.

At a packed public forum in Midland on July 19 to oppose the merger, over 500 members of the community showed up, including Huronia Hospital physicians, several Huronia board members who had resigned from the board in opposition, three mayors from nearby towns, politicians, and representatives from the Ontario Nurses Association, several unions, and pro-choice groups.

Carolyn Egan of the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada (ARCC-CDAC) told the crowd how critically important it was to maintain a full range of reproductive health services, including abortion, since the loss of such services hurts the community as a whole. She noted that many at the forum expressed dismay that Catholic religious doctrine might be imposed on an entire community.

“The overwhelming support from ordinary citizens for the pro-choice position was incredibly gratifying,” said Egan. “Women who used to be active in the pro-choice movement, some going back thirty years, came up and spoke to me. Also, young women in the community are providing support and leadership in the campaign, which is great to see.”

Every single doctor at the Huronia Hospital has come out against the merger. So far, local groups and volunteers have managed to sign up over 1000 new hospital members who plan to vote against the proposed merger. The energetic campaign has attracted national media attention. “I am delighted that this struggle is now getting national coverage because it clearly has implications for women across the country,” said Egan. “This local campaign highlights the issue of health care cutbacks and hospital reorganizations, and their effects on reproductive health. Abortion clinics serve many of the needs in urban areas, but in rural parts of the country, women really depend on hospital abortions.”

“The planned merger undermines the right of Canadians to access health care under the *Canada Health Act*,” said Joyce Arthur, another ARCC-CDAC spokesperson. “A hospital can’t be allowed to withdraw essential medical services simply because it needs to clear a debt. We’re 100% behind this campaign to fight the merger, and want to congratulate the Midland community for its inspiring work.”

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