

Province doesn't pay the whole bill

EDITORIAL

THE HEADWATERS HEALTH CARE Foundation celebrated another monumental milestone last week, announcing a new record fundraising total through its 22nd annual hospital gala, held at Hockley Valley Resort on May 4.

In the course of a single evening, the organization raked in a net total north of \$380,000 – money that will be used to help pay for much-needed equipment at our local hospital.

After engaging with various members of our community over the past week, it became clear to members of the Citizen's newsroom that there is a misconception amongst the general public, here in Dufferin County and, likely, the rest of Ontario, over who, exactly, is responsible for fronting the money for important pieces of medical infrastructure. Long story short, the answer is simple. We are.

Stacey Daub, Headwaters Health Care Centre President and CEO, said it best when, in a previous interview with the Citizen, she said the provincial government pays for the “bricks and mortar”, while the community covers the costs of necessary improvements and enhancements.

It has been this way for as long as we can remember.

Looking at the most recent financial report posted to the HHCC website, for the year between April 1, 2017 and March 31, 2018, our local hospital received just over \$48 million in funding from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The bulk of that money, \$43 million in fact, went towards what was defined in the report as patient care, with the remaining \$5 million designated as one-time costs (\$3.5 million) and physician programs (\$1.6 million).

Deeper into the report, HHCC declares that it spent just under \$40 million on employee salaries and benefits in 2017/18. Meaning, after covering pay, HHCC had just \$8 million left over in government funding to pay for programming, drugs and other day-to-day supplies.

It is easy to see then why there is often nothing left over in the hospital's annual budget to pay for various enhancements, needed or wanted, at the facility. The provincial government simply does not provide enough money to allow our hospitals to keep up with equipment and technology advances.

This is where the Headwaters Health Care Foundation steps in. As the main fundraising arm of the hospital, the Foundation's sole purpose is to raise money year after year to help pay for some of the upgrades hospital staff deem as necessary to continue allowing them to do what they do on a daily basis. Last year, the Foundation managed to raise more than \$2 million, which allowed the hospital to purchase a slew of new state-of-the-art beds, a fetal monitor and a specialized bassinet for the hospital's Labour and Delivery Unit. In years gone by, the gala has helped pay for upgrades to the facility's IT department, new vital sign monitors, specialized stretchers, new defibrillators and an electrosurgical unit.

The Foundation is, once again, on course to donate more than \$2 million to the hospital this fiscal year.

While the Foundation has done a phenomenal job in recent years rallying support for the facility, there is a lingering question over how long we can continue to rely on those with deep pockets within our community to carry on subsidizing our hospital. Is this something the government, rather than individual volunteers, should be on the hook for? We believe so.

Alas, with Ontario currently carrying a debt load in the region of \$350 billion we are realistic enough to know that Queen's Park, at least in the short-term, is unlikely to increase its hospital funding.

But perhaps there is a role at the municipal level, where it could be argued that annual donations to the local hospital through property taxes would be at least as reasonable as the current requirement to fund former provincial highways.

But meanwhile, to our community, and, indeed, the people over at Headwaters Health Care Foundation, we say 'keep up the good work'. Your contributions to improving our local hospital will likely be needed, and relied upon, for years to come.