

## Doctors hit by closures seek legal, money advice

BY TIMOTHY AVERY

**T**HE LOOMING prospect of hospital closures, mergers and downsizing among medical staff has Ontario physicians edgy and wary about their future.

The Ontario government committee recommending massive restructuring of the province's hospitals extended the deadline for rebuttal to its proposals by representatives of the affected personnel by two weeks.

In the meantime, medical staff associations (MSA) are seeking legal counsel to protect their interests.

Dr. Phil Berger of Wellesley Hospital said doctors are seeking legal advice to ensure the government lives up to its contractual obligations. If hospitals are closed or merged, he said, the staff have the right to equitable access to resources; meaning the government must find them other jobs.

Dr. Richard Perrin, head of Wellesley's MSA, said doctors' concerns for their future are not primarily a financial matter.

"I didn't go into medicine to get rich," he said. "I did it to save the world."

Given that attitude, which Dr. Perrin insists is widespread among physicians, perhaps it should be no surprise that "exit counselling" is low on the list of priorities for beleaguered doctors.

One man thinks that's a big mistake.

⇒ Robert Zinner, a financial analyst and career counsellor who specializes in the concerns of physicians, is a strong advocate of what he calls the "proactive

approach" to doctors' management of their financial affairs and career options.

Zinner chuckles when he considers the layman's view that a medical degree is the ticket to financial security and wealth.

"I've helped a lot of bankrupt and nearly bankrupt doctors," he said, producing an impressively thick portfolio of endorsements by some of the province's leading physicians and health care administrators.

"Most doctors are so busy with the demands of their careers—patient care, seeking research grants, professional upgrading and administrative tasks—they find it extremely difficult to develop financial plans."

Most physicians have their money in RSPs, limited partnerships and modest investments, Zinner said.

Many of them have no idea how these are performing and may not even be aware of potential dangers.

"Doctors are a favorite target of unscrupulous stock promoters because these people know they don't have time to carefully consider everything that comes across their desks. They don't have staff to help them manage their financial affairs."

Zinner, through his association with accounting and legal firms can offer free, or low-cost advice on portfolios, taxes, wills and powers of attorney.

The other side of Zinner's operation is career guidance.

He points to the crisis facing Ontario's physicians as an example of global changes affecting all

sectors of the economy and stresses that the need for flexibility and adaptability is vital to survive the challenge.

"Physicians, like all self-employed professionals need to recreate who and what they are and how they function in order to stay in a marketable position."

He urges his clients to be objective in measuring their skills in relation to their peers within their department, the city, Ontario, Canada and internationally.

He encourages them to keep careful notes of contributions they have made and provide verification from superiors.

Zinner is plugged in and urges doctors to follow his lead. Departments and individuals need to establish Internet web sites to

communicate with their peers in Canada and beyond.

He urges senior staff who may be facing termination to investigate opportunities with pharmaceutical companies through contacts they have built up with industry representatives during their practice. Zinner also suggests senior personnel look into positions with social-service agencies or in the counselling field.

He provides his initial assessment, financial and career, free of charge. For many clients, the results of the consultation will allow them to straighten out their affairs on their own. For others, the information it provides can be presented to their own lawyers and accountants as a guide to where the client wants to go.