

Get referred to local surgeon

Monday January 5 2009

Headwaters Health Care Centre

Moving from Brampton to Orangeville, Robyn Moir was not looking forward to travelling to the city for her son's ear, nose and throat specialist appointments.

"My family doctor referred me to an otolaryngologist due to my son's chronic ear infections but I couldn't get an appointment to see the specialist for over a month. I figured now that I live in Orangeville I shouldn't have to travel to the city for appointments. I requested a referral to an Orangeville specialist," says Moir. "Now my son will get his surgery sooner and he'll be closer to home."

"Travelling to Toronto, Richmond Hill, Woodbridge or Mississauga was common for me. Whenever my doctor in the city sent me to a specialist it was never local," says David Unwin of Caledon.

What is the reason for this? Doctors will send patients to someone they know — for local residents that isn't always convenient.

Why don't patients ask for a local referral?

"Sometimes they don't know that they can. Their family doctor will send them to someone they know," says Dr. Jeff McKinnon, chief of staff at Headwaters Health Care Centre. "A physician can refer a patient to any specialist."

The benefit of having your procedures done locally is when you leave the hospital you can get home to rest all that much faster. Also, your friends and family are around and able to provide support more easily.

"When my daughter needed surgery I had to drive to a specialist in North York. Ironically I live 10 minutes from Headwaters," Unwin said. "On the day of my daughter's surgery we had to leave the house at 5 a.m. to get to the hospital to check in for surgery scheduled at 7:30 a.m. Now that I know I can request that my doctor refer me to Headwaters I will always make that request."

Family doctors will typically refer patients to hospitals where their colleagues have privileges but they can just as easily refer you to a surgeon in your hometown. Patients can have their procedure done locally and all follow-up appointments scheduled locally. It is up to the patient to make the request if their doctor isn't based in Dufferin-Caledon.

"Why would anyone want to wait longer than necessary to book their surgery? As a patient I have the right to ask my family doctor to refer me to a specialist located anywhere," Moir said.

Headwaters Health Care Centre has surgeons specializing in general surgery, obstetrics, gynaecology, ear, nose and throat surgery, and ophthalmology. Ask your doctor for a local referral. For more information visit the hospital website at www.headwatershealth.ca and click on Patient Services.