

Health unit far exceeds

Peel County Brog.

original mandate

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Health units were originally set up in the late 1900's with emphasis on communicable diseases and prevention by immunization.

Today, with diseases like diphtheria and polio under control, mandatory immunization in schools has been dropped in Peel and immunization is only one facet of the job that is before Peel Regional Health Unit.

The Health Unit, says Dr. Appleford, Peel's medical officer of health, from his Brampton Mall office on Highway 10, is primarily there to perform functions for people on a collective, rather than individual basis.

Dr. Applewood has been involved in public health for a long time. He graduated as a medical doctor from the University of Toronto in 1936 and, during the war, served as superintendent of the Basingstoke hospital in England which combined plastic surgery, neurosurgery and psychiatry in treating Canadian army casualties.

Following the war he took his diploma in public health, a legal requirement for his present position under the Public Health Act. He was involved in occupational health at the Steel Company of Canada prior to going to Middlesex in 1968 as medical officer of health.

Dr. Applewood came to Peel in 1972 when Middlesex-London health units merged. Peel, at that time, was smaller than Middlesex but has grown from 300,000 to 400,000 in five years, Dr. Appleford says.

With the tremendous growth ("It's too big") has come an increased demand for services in all fields, he says.

Because of the high cost of immunization, mandatory immunization in schools was dropped in early 1977, Dr. Appleford says.

EARLY MONTHS IMPORTANT

"My concern over immunization is mainly in the first 18 months of a child's life," Dr. Appleford says. Doctors are informing their patients and ensuring that mothers take infants in for their series of needles which commences at three months of age. However only about 75 per cent of children entering school have been properly immunized, he says.

In spite of this, Dr. Appleford says the health unit keeps immunization records and informs parents via letter when additional immunization is due. This program is better than it was before, he says, when some school children missed the needles and others got two.

Health units are funded 75 per cent by the provincial ministry and 25 per cent by the region. The annual budget is about \$2 million — or about \$5 per person, he says.

In spite of budget restraints, Dr. Appleford has already applied to the ministry for increased funding to increase staff. Eight more nurses and four more inspectors are needed, he says. Present staff is 106 workers, including inspectors, clerical help, nurses and dental workers.

About 67 per cent of health care costs in Peel go into nursing and home care costs. (Nursing homes no longer come under the health unit's jurisdiction).

Home care costs involve services purchased from the Victorian Order or the St. Elizabeth Visiting Order of Nurses. Dr. Appleford says Peel is attempting to utilize these services more and more in an attempt to cut down on hospital costs.

It costs \$100 a day to keep a person in the hospital as opposed to \$12.50 a day to supply home care — so the emphasis is on getting people out of hospitals sooner, he says.

About 17 per cent of health care costs goes into environmental health. This includes monitoring restaurants and food facilities.

Dr. Appleford admits he is not happy with environmental health services. When the ministry of environment took over responsibility for contamination of the environment, it left some gaps in the system, he says.

POWER TO CLOSE PLANTS

The medical officer of health has the power to inspect and close operations at a plant such as TRICIL if he believes it to be causing a health hazard to the people, but he has to be very sure of his facts before authorizing any order to cease operation, he says. If his facts were wrong, TRICIL could sue the board of health, he says.

He mentions as an example the case in Toronto where the Toronto board of health became involved in an industry thought to be causing lead contamination. The company threatened to sue one of the health unit members, he says.

Dr. Appleford has requested information from the ministry of environment on PCBs and is testing PCB levels in the milk of mothers who request it (at the University of Guelph). So far, test results from two short-term residents in Erin Mills indicate that the level is "very low" — lower than the federal government acceptable level. Dr. Appleford said he didn't know what the acceptable baseline level was.

The board of health still has responsibility for the safety of its citizens, he said.

Environmental health includes everything from monitoring restaurants to moving bodies in cemeteries to issuing permits for septic tanks.

There are 26 sections under the public health act which make some reference to the medical officer of health, he says. These include swimming pool inspections to ensure there are adequate lifeguards and pools are properly chlorinated.

Restaurant inspections should ideally be carried out once a month but because of the large number of restaurants and catering services — and extravaganzas like Fritterfest, once a year is more within the realm of the budget, he says.