

# Peel health head hangs up stethoscope

By PHIL GRAVELLE

Dr. Lillian Cherkas will be remembered for her fight to establish Peel County's first confidential venereal disease clinic in 1971.

Working without a budget, and in the face of strong resistance from doctors and the public, she raised \$1,100 from local businesses and ran the clinic herself at first.

"People were not as open and frank about these things then," said Cherkas, who retires this month as medical officer of health for the Region of Peel.

Although the VD clinics have been valuable for people who are afraid to go to their own doctors, Cherkas says they have not been able to reduce the number of cases.

"You just hope you can get them early enough to treat them, to avoid disabilities later," she said.

Irene Korecz, who was hired by Cherkas in 1970 as an administrative assistant and who is now director of health planning and policy at Peel Region, said her boss was "very courageous" to establish the clinic.

Cherkas got her medical degree from the University of Toronto in 1943, interning at St. Michael's and the Hospital for Sick Children and getting her diploma in public health from the University of Toronto in 1946.

From 1947 to 1955 she worked in general practice, then quit for a time to raise her family. In 1968 she returned to U of T to study new medical procedures, and worked for a short period at Women's College Hospital before being hired as Peel's medical officer

of health, where she stayed until 1972.

She worked on a swine flu program and as an adviser to the Ministry of Community and Social Services, then returned to Peel in 1979.

Diseases that were a concern when Cherkas entered the profession, such as smallpox and polio, have been brought under control. The board of health has a continuing concern over other matters such as water quality, she said.

Her staff has grown to 170, including doctors, community health nurses, public health inspectors, dental educators, home care coordinators and support staff. The department has expanded into health research, and concern over environmental health and personal lifestyles.

"We try to get people to take better care of themselves," she said.

She feels content to retire at age 65, but says compulsory retirement is unfair for some people who want to continue working and have the ability. "I'm happy enough to retire and do nothing until the end of the year, and then see what pops up," she said.

Other highlights of her career include the setting up of Peel's first family planning clinic, the use of baby clinics before medical insurance became universal, the establishment of the home care program in Peel and the idea of team nursing, which allows nurses to work closely within assigned geographical areas.