



St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital

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Letter to the Editor Issued to the St Thomas Times Journal March 31, 2010

Dear Editor;

Contrary to messages delivered during the OPSEU meeting held in front of the Hospital on Monday March 29, the St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital (STEGH) is in no danger of closing and in fact is getting stronger and will be a part of this community for a long time to come.

In your recent article covering this OPSEU event, there were a number of serious inaccuracies that must be clarified. In particular, you include numerous quotes from Mr. Franche, identified as the regional vice-president for OPSEU (not an employee of this hospital), which are factually incorrect.

We began the process of automating our payroll system, called Kronos, five years ago. Currently we are implementing a system upgrade to provide accessible and transparent payroll and scheduling information for employees and management alike.

What's exciting about this system is that employees can access their personal payroll information, as well as swap shifts, review schedules, etc. A biometric finger scanner is used for individual payroll validation for all employees. This device eliminates the need for signing in. Similar devices have been in use for approximately two years across Elgin County in Elgin Manor, Terrace Lodge and Bobier Villa.

Your article states that, "The hospital will tell you this decision was made for health and safety reasons." Although there is a safety benefit, the decision to add the biometric scanner device is to complete the automation of payroll validation.

Mr. Franche further states, "What management is asking you to do with biometrics is nothing short of a crime." This is an accusation with no basis in evidence that applies to STEGH or the other agencies and companies in Elgin County and elsewhere, who have been using this device.

I also want to be clear that the biometric device did not cost \$500,000, as reported in your story. The device is just a component of the larger automated payroll and scheduling system package. The system will pay for itself in 2.5 years, following which the hospital will accrue a savings of \$250,000 per year.

What's most disturbing is the claim that, "Administration has not met with the union before implementing biometrics." I want to assure you that we made every attempt to reach out to this union to discuss the new system. OPSEU union leaders in this hospital declined to attend several meetings where this information was presented and discussed. Interestingly, the other unions did attend. A week-long information open house was also held in early February for all STEGH staff to drop in and learn more about the new system.

Finally, Mr. Franche speaks of a "freeze". I assume this refers to a recent OPSEU media release that reports of a front-line hiring freeze at STEGH. There is no hiring freeze at STEGH. Any position that becomes vacant, be it frontline or management, is reviewed prior to a decision to fill the position.

Our obligation at STEGH is to provide an excellent patient care experience and to make decisions that meet the legal requirement to have a balanced budget. The St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital is recognized as a strong player in our regional healthcare system, and will continue to be so for many years to come, as long as we adopt leading practices and adapt to the constantly changing environment that is modern healthcare.

Paul Collins
President and CEO
St. Thomas Elgin General Hospital