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HOSPITAL FUNDING

Mr. Michael Prue: My question is to the Minister of Health. In the past year, this minister and her predecessor both have stated that Toronto East General Hospital was a model of excellent care, unparalleled in this province. Its CEO was sent out to help other hospitals that found themselves in financial difficulty.

We now know that our hospital in my community is at risk. The hospital's physiotherapy clinic will close next week, and 118 nurses throughout the hospital have been given pink slips.

Why is this government forcing the closure of the physiotherapy clinic and giving 118 registered nurses pink slips at a hospital which, by your own admission, has given and continues to give unparalleled excellent care?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: I'd like to take this opportunity to agree with the member opposite: Toronto East General Hospital does do excellent work. The hospital's CEO, Rob Devitt, is a leader among leaders in our health care system. He, like those in all other hospitals, is working very hard to make sure we get the very best value for health care in this province. The era of year-over-year unsustainable, unaffordable rates of increase for hospitals—those days are over. We've built the foundation for health care in this province and now we must drive the very best value for the money we spend on health care. That's important for the patients because we need to continue to provide better health care for people in this province.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: This is a hospital that gives absolutely excellent care. You stand in this place and you say that, and you say that Mr. Devitt is a great CEO. Nobody is disagreeing with that. My community does not disagree. But we have consulted with hospital staff and with members of the community who fear the worst—that the excellent care that Toronto East General Hospital provides to the community will be eroded and that the services that you are so proud of that are currently available in east Toronto and East York will be gone forever.

Why is this government shutting down essential community health care services at Toronto East General Hospital, which, by your own admission, provides the best?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: This is a government that values improving health care for the people of Ontario. We've demonstrated tremendous progress. In fact, there's a new report out today from CIHI that puts Ontario at the top of all provinces when it comes to wait times.

We need to continue to improve health care for the people of this province, but that does mean making some of the difficult decisions. I would welcome the advice and support of all members of this Legislature on how we can create the kind of health care system that will be here not just for us, not just for our generation, but for our kids and for our grandkids.

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Final supplementary?

Mr. Michael Prue: The minister can speak her bafflegab all she wants, but the community and its dedicated health care professionals know the truth. This government of Dalton McGuinty doesn't give a hoot about our local hospital or any of the local hospitals. We're being treated just as badly as you treat Fort Erie, Port Colborne, Burk's Falls and many other community hospitals.

This minister knows full well her government is forcing local hospitals like Toronto East General Hospital to make these drastic cuts because they won't increase funding by more than 1%. Will this government reverse its wrong-headed directive respecting our hospital and community and keep our health care professionals working in an excellent environment?

Hon. Deborah Matthews: We all await this afternoon's budget with great anticipation, and that includes our hospitals across this province.

Let me tell you about what we have done at Toronto East General Hospital. You might consider ignoring them or whatever: a nearly \$33-million increase in base funding since we were elected-\$33 million. I think that's pretty good. Over \$14.4 million in total funding to reduce wait times: That's 18,550 more procedures than they would have had otherwise without that wait times strategy.

We're also investing in services outside hospitals, in the community. Our aging at home strategy is one that is receiving attention internationally, because we know that by investing outside of hospitals in the communities, we can provide better care, and it's better care for patients-

The Speaker (Hon. Steve Peters): Thank you. New question.