

# Another emergency room to close this weekend

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KITCHENER, Ont — Premier Dalton McGuinty vowed Friday to stabilize the emergency room situation and "leave no stone unturned" across the province as another ER scrambled to stay open this long weekend.

A hospital in Hanover, Ont., north of Kitchener, found a resident at the last minute to staff its emergency room after threatening to close holiday Monday.

The hospital -- which serves about 18,000 patients -- is the latest in a string of Ontario emergency rooms threatening closure and cancelling surgeries because they are understaffed and have no hospital beds to accommodate patients.

"It's getting harder and harder as we get into the winter months," said Katrina Wilson, president and CEO of Hanover Hospital. "We've got some difficulty filling in shifts."

McGuinty, who attended Oktoberfest celebrations in Kitchener after visiting an emergency room in Kitchener-Waterloo that barely escaped closure, said the province has "no choice" but to resolve the problems plaguing emergency rooms across the province.

Kitchener's Grand River hospital was hours away from shutting its doors recently when doctors in the department refused to work out of concern about exhaustion, patient safety and compensation. The province has since appointed an investigator to look into staffing problems at the hospital.

A neighbouring hospital in Cambridge brought in a private company to manage its emergency room when it faced its own staffing crisis. And Hamilton hospitals had to cancel at least 15 surgeries in the last week because of a shortage of beds, leaving patients stuck in the emergency department.

"We're not going to leave any stone unturned to ensure we have stability in all our emergency rooms and to make sure Ontarians have a tremendous sense of confidence when it comes to their ability to access their emergency room," McGuinty told reporters Friday.

Emergency rooms are struggling because of a shortage of hospital beds, pay issues for ER physicians and a overall lack of doctors, he said.

The government is working with the Ontario Medical Association to examine the challenges facing hospital emergency rooms, McGuinty said. Recommendations are expected within several weeks, he added.

"We're going to move as fast as we can," McGuinty said. "I don't think we have a choice."

But critics say it's not fast enough.

Conservative health critic Elizabeth Witmer says emergency rooms are in crisis and the situation is only going to worsen when flu season hits.

"If we were ever hit with a pandemic, there is no possible way we could accommodate the people," she said. "A plan to deal with the emergency room crisis is long overdue."

But in Hanover, Wilson remains optimistic the province will resolve the situation before she has to scramble again to keep the hospital's emergency room staffed.

"They all realize the issues -- it's the physician shortage," she said. "I think everybody's working hard to find a solution to that."