

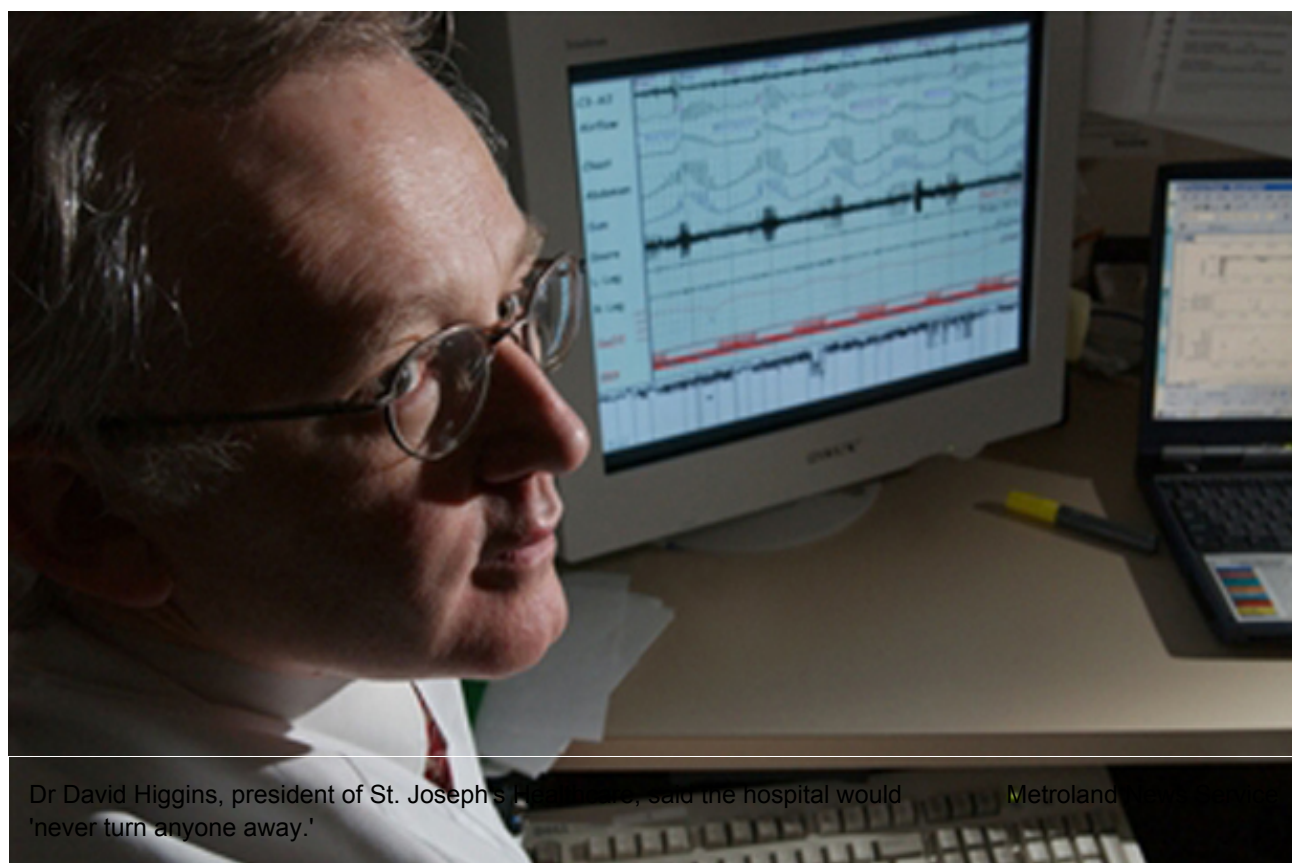
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# St. Joe's paying for care of refugees cut off by Ottawa

By Staff  
Metorland News Service



Dr David Higgins, president of St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton, said the hospital would 'never turn anyone away.' Metroland

**Hamilton's hospitals are starting to bear the costs of federal cuts to refugee care.**

**"I see the cuts beginning to bite," said Dr. David Higgins, president of St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton. "We're going to see more of these patients present to hospital."**

**St. Joseph's is caring for at least one refugee a week with no health coverage after the federal**

government made significant cuts a year ago, affecting, in particular, those from countries deemed to be safe by Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

Among those being seen are women at the end of their pregnancies who have had no prenatal care, and patients with complications from heart disease and diabetes because their chronic illnesses aren't being properly managed.

It presents a significant dilemma for area hospitals which are ethically obligated to treat these patients, but don't have the resources at a time when they are cutting costs by \$40 million.

"We'd never turn anyone away," said Higgins. "On the other hand, there is a cost to that."

As a result, St. Joseph's has put its support behind a national day of action Monday arranged by doctors opposed to the cuts.

It is also starting to track the cost of caring for uninsured refugees after Toronto's hospitals reported footing bills adding up to hundreds of thousands of dollars. The cuts have cost the University Health Network \$800,000 in its emergency rooms alone. The cost is \$112,000 at St. Joseph's Health Centre, \$70,000 at Toronto East General Hospital and \$63,000 at St. Michael's Hospital.

"I have called on the federal government to reverse the decision," Health Minister Deb Matthews told The Spectator. "We're watching it very closely. It's not fair to put health professionals in the position of refusing care based on someone's refugee status. We are hearing from hospitals about the pressures."

Hamilton Health Sciences hasn't started tracking the costs yet, but says it's on the radar.

"We are concerned about it," said Dr. Richard McLean, executive vice-president of interprofessional practice. "The federal government has basically downloaded these costs."

Citizen and Immigration Canada predicts the changes will save \$100 million over five years and says it will bring refugee claimants in line with the majority of Canadians.

"Canadians have been clear that they do not want illegal immigrants and bogus asylum claimants receiving free, gold-plated health-care benefits that are better than those that Canadian taxpayers and seniors receive," said a statement provided by the department.

"The Government of Canada has taken steps to ensure that genuine refugees and asylum seekers from non-safe countries continue to receive comprehensive health-care coverage."

Canadian Doctors for Refugee Care argue it costs taxpayers more money when refugees, who have been cut off care, end up in the emergency department because chronic conditions and other health issues aren't being properly monitored.

"We're not surprised the hospitals are getting some of the costs downloaded to them," said Hamilton internist and local leader Dr. Tim O'Shea. "People who are not able to get primary care are forced to wai

for a crisis and go to the ER. That is more costly and not the best place to get care.”

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