

## Ajax-Pickering hospital CEO to leave

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AJAX -- After turning what started as a four-month position into two years, the hospital's president and CEO has chosen to end his stay.

Rik Ganderton will not renew his contract at Rouge Valley Ajax and Pickering, but will keep his position until the hospital board finds a replacement. He calls it a tough decision but feels he's accomplished what he set out to and is ready for new challenges. Mr.

Ganderton had worked for more than 25 years as a senior health care consultant and business manager before coming to the Rouge Valley Health System in 2007. He's held senior positions with organizations such as The Hospital for Sick Children and Women's College Hospital.

He joined RVHS when it was facing a massive debt, and experienced challenges along the way. In late 2007, a peer review team criticized RVHS for its \$78-million deficit and negativity among staff. A number of changes followed, including layoffs and the consolidation of the mental health unit, which moved inpatient beds from Rouge Valley Ajax and Pickering hospital to Centenary in Scarborough. The change was hard on both staff and the community, he says.

"I think it's been very difficult for all those concerned, as I think all tough decisions are," he says in an interview.

Mr. Ganderton still believes it was the right choice. He cited access to a better level of care for mental health patients by



AJ Groen / Metroland

AJAX -- After two years as president and chief executive officer for the Rouge Valley Health System Ajax Pickering site, Rik Ganderton has resigned. April 20 2009

expanding crisis services and increasing nursing care in the inpatient unit. While Centenary's inpatient unit has been criticized, and Mr. Ganderton admits it needs renovations, "it's not as bad as it's portrayed," he said.

Also, the extra space on the third floor in Ajax will accommodate the 29 medical beds RVHS hopes to receive funding for, which will help improve flow of the emergency department, he says. It's undergoing a massive expansion, scheduled for completion this August or September.

It's important RVHS addresses the range of services Durham Region needs as it grows in the meantime, he says.

Mr. Ganderton's thankful for the support from the Town of Ajax and the City of Pickering.

"That level of community support is critical," he says.

Although the Friends of Ajax-Pickering hospital has been critical of the hospital during Mr. Ganderton's time as president, he thinks "they mean well."

RVHS board chairwoman Janet Ecker thanked the outgoing president for his strong leadership in a press release.

"When we brought Rik in, our hospital was facing serious difficulties on all fronts," she says. "A radical overhaul was needed. The board has been very pleased with the progress that has been made under Rik's leadership over the last two and a half years. We now have a stronger foundation to build on as we go forward."

She added RVHS has balanced its books for the first time since 1998.

Mr. Ganderton's work has included: a multi-year capital plan and major facility upgrades that are underway; completion of a mental health supportive housing project; and the redevelopment of the Ajax campus, which is on time and on budget.

Mr. Ganderton's been most pleased with the "renewed pride" staff have in the organization and is thankful for their help in improving the hospital's situation.

Throughout Mr. Ganderton's time at RVHS, he's learned the virtue of patience and has been reminded "there's nothing easy in health care." He'll probably return to the field, he admits; just not before he relaxes, travels and takes a breather.