

Liberals reveal ER closure numbers

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Emergency rooms across Nova Scotia were closed for 154 days this year, the highest total in six years, the Liberals say.

The Liberals added up all the temporary closures at the province's emergency rooms in 2006 and found they totalled 3,700 hours, or 154 days.

That's a 75 per cent increase over last year and the highest total in a six-year period.

The Liberals released the numbers on Monday and urged the governing Tories to do more to solve a staffing shortage.

Harold (Junior) Theriault, MLA for Digby-Annapolis, says the situation is stressful on his elderly constituents.

"An elderly person 80, 90 years old is asking me what happens if she gets sick," he said. "That's the worst thing of all, them sitting home and worrying about this."

Dr. Paul Doucette, an ER doctor in Dartmouth, says the shortage of doctors will eventually hit urban areas as older doctors retire.

He wants the province to train more emergency doctors at Dalhousie medical school and pay city physicians extra to cover off rural areas during holidays.

"No one in the province is impervious to this," Doucette said. "We're running out of doctors who are willing to do emergency medicine."

Neither Doucette nor the Liberals could offer examples of a patient's health being compromised by the ER closures.

Health Minister Chris D'Entremont said he was unaware of any serious incidents.

"We expect people when they are having emergencies they should be using [ambulance service] and the 911 system," the minister said.

D'Entremont said he has no plans to expand training for ER doctors, but he'll examine the idea of extra pay for fill-in work in rural areas.