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York Central Hospital Seeing Steady Progress in Reducing Waiting Times!

RICHMOND HILL, ON. – Despite the challenges of serving one of Canada’s fastest growing communities, York Central Hospital is proud of having one of the lowest wait times in the province in treating emergency patients with minor conditions. The hospital credits its success to the hard work and commitment of its staff across the hospital in providing expert and compassionate care in the most timely and efficient manner possible.

On February 19, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care released a new website to track and monitor the wait times for Emergency Rooms (ERs) across the province. According to the website, York Central Hospital’s wait times for patients being treated for minor conditions is already meeting the provincial wait time target of 4 hours for patients with minor or uncomplicated conditions. The hospital is especially proud of this accomplishment considering the extraordinary pressures its staff and physicians face on a daily basis due to the continued growth in Southwest York Region.

“Since April of 2008, York Central Hospital has experienced a 10% increase in urgent Emergency patient visits,” says Dr. Larry Grossman, the hospital Chief of Staff. “That’s a phenomenal increase in a short amount of time. Among these patients, the severity of conditions has also increased. The hospital has done a great job of caring for patients with more minor ailments and injuries, but continues to experience challenges with patients with more serious conditions who require further investigation and monitoring and often need to be admitted to hospital. Overcrowding in the ER due to a lack of inpatient beds leads to delays in both assessment and transfers out of the department.”

Ninety percent of patients with more serious or complex conditions requiring more time for diagnosis, treatment or hospital bed admission are being seen within 15.3 hours. Although the provincial target for these patients is 8 hours, only a handful of hospitals are currently able to provide care within that timeline.

“Although we applaud the province’s commitment to openness and transparency through this wait time initiative, what is not captured on the website is the increasing severity of the conditions of our patients and the limited capacity we have to admit these patients to an inpatient bed,” says Bruce Harber, Hospital President and CEO. “This is an area that we are working very hard to improve, but without permanent funding to open and maintain additional beds in which to admit these patients we will continue to struggle to meet the provincial target for those with more serious conditions.”

“Another significant challenge that impacts hospitals across the province is the number of Alternative Level of Care (ALC) patients that no longer require hospital care but continue to occupy a bed while they wait for placement in other care settings such as long term care, rehabilitation, complex continuing care and palliative care. On average 24% of hospital beds in the Central LHIN are occupied by ALC

patients awaiting placement in the community which ultimately reduces the number of beds available to patients awaiting admission in hospital emergency departments,” adds Harber.

Currently, the hospital has created a temporary care unit in its former dialysis unit to care for up to 15 patients coming from the ER who need to be admitted but must wait until a bed becomes available before they can be transferred to a regular inpatient care setting. While everyone agrees this is not the ideal solution, it is just one of the many creative measures the hospital has taken to cope with the pressures on its ER and hospital.

Growing and Improving Care to Meet the Needs of our Community

Thanks to its current facility redevelopment project, last summer the hospital was able to open approximately two thirds of its new and expanded Emergency Department moving its ER care into spacious new quarters with state-of-the-art equipment and facilities. Later this spring, construction will be completed on the remaining sections of its new Emergency Department further increasing the footprint of the ER and its ability to flow patients through its specially designed treatment zones. These color coded treatment zones were introduced to help guide patients and their families to the appropriate areas of care. More critically ill patients are being treated in the Blue and Yellow Zones, while the Red Zone is reserved for patients with minor conditions and the Green Zone treats patients with fractures and minor injuries.

“Patients love the new facilities and even though sections of the department are still in construction, already we have doubled the size of the treatment area which has helped to ease the overcrowding, given staff and physicians the space they need to deliver optimal care and increased personal privacy at the bedside,” says Dr. Grossman.

Other initiatives to enhance the timely care of patients include the introduction of an urgent treatment area for pediatric patients which enables children to be seen by paediatricians and specially trained paediatric nurses in a family friendly area separate from the adults in the Emergency Department. This initiative helps reduce anxiety levels among both the children and their parents and enables the hospital to provide more specialized care to their young patients resulting in better outcomes.

As part of a provincial initiative, recently the hospital introduced a new ambulance off-load nurse role within the Emergency Department. This position is new to the ER and adds additional staff, over and above the regular staffing complement; this enables the nurse to devote her/his full attention to taking over the care of patients brought in by ambulance until the ER is able assume care within the department. This is a win-win for both patients who are closely monitored while they wait to be moved into the ER and local ambulance services that are then able to respond to other emergency calls from residents across the Region.

“Our goal is to provide our patients and community with some of the lowest wait times in the province for patients with minor conditions as well as those patients who have more complex conditions often requiring admission to hospital. Until then, we will continue to advocate for the operating funding and expanded facilities that will enable us to reach that goal,” adds Dr. Grossman.

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