

## **Pembroke Regional Hospital Finds Innovative Ways To Address Unprecedented Staffing Challenges**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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PEMBROKE – While staffing challenges in the health care sector are nothing new, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic two-and-a-half years ago coupled with high staff infection rates has now shed light on a broader, acute labour challenge, not only within our own organization, but across the province and beyond.

In recent weeks, hospitals across the country have had to take drastic measures to cope with staff shortages, including temporarily closing emergency departments and other services.

While the Pembroke Regional Hospital has not had to make such a critical decision, the work going on behind the scenes to ensure appropriate staffing is in place each day is unprecedented, said Beth Brownlee, Vice-President of Clinical and Support Services.

In fact, Statistics Canada has reported that job vacancies in health care during the first quarter of this year were nearly double what they were two years ago, in part due to the stress of the pandemic and increased workloads which has led to high rates of retirement and exits from the profession, while there aren't enough new nursing graduates to fill the spots.

“We have been asking our workforce to do a lot in order to fill in the gaps and ensure that the uninterrupted, high quality care that our patients deserve remains in place. However, with everyone stepping up, including our management team, our health care team is fatigued,” Ms. Brownlee said.

One of the ways in which hospitals, including ours, are now addressing this situation in the short term is to work with our health care teams to trial a number of innovative staffing models and alternative models of care including a team-based approach that ensures all health care professionals are working at their skill level and within their scope of practice, while contributing their knowledge and skills in the best way possible.

“This team-based staffing model has long been a goal in our organization and requires a new way of thinking but ultimately it is about working together to support one another and ensure safe, uninterrupted care of our patients,” Ms. Brownlee said.

Another aspect of the innovative staffing model involves the expansion of health care teams to include new roles and welcome in other health care professionals.

This is not entirely new to PRH. We have experienced workforce issues in various staffing categories over the years. As an example, Rehabilitation Assistants were introduced into the hospital and teams and we have also worked to expand the scope of practice of our Pharmacy technicians. “More recently though we have integrated Health Care Aides who are supporting

clinical operations on our Rehabilitation, Acute Mental Health and Intensive Care units, with further expansion of this model planned for other clinical units,” Ms. Brownlee said. “We have also added Unit Support Workers to our Medical program to assist with non-clinical duties. Furthermore, we have welcomed an International Nursing Graduate to our Rehabilitation program and hope that we will be able to expand this initiative in the future.”

Other pilot initiatives underway to help support staffing and optimal patient care include Physician Assistants supporting our hospitalist team, increased Respiratory Therapy support in our ICU and the addition of Advance Care Paramedics in our Emergency Department as part of the team.

While these trials are helping to decrease the number of unfilled shifts, they alone aren’t enough to guarantee a long-term solution to the staffing crisis.

For that, the hospital is working towards a number of long-term recruitment and retention strategies.

Human Resources Director Brent McIntyre said the hospital is expanding its recruitment efforts by taking full advantage of social media channels and traditional methods such as in-person job fairs. They are also connecting with clinical educators in nursing to ensure that students are fully aware of career opportunities at PRH.

“We also want to ensure that our newest recruits not only feel welcome but supported through mentorship opportunities while finding new and innovative ways to express gratitude and ensure that our existing team members feel valued,” Mr. McIntyre said.

The Pembroke Regional Hospital is extremely appreciative of the work being done by all staff and physicians in these challenging times and both the Board and Senior Leadership team have said that the level of commitment and dedication to working together and supporting one another is outstanding.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:**  
**Carolyn Levesque, Public Affairs and Communications Coordinator**  
**Pembroke Regional Hospital**  
**(613) 732-3675, extension 6165 / [carolyn.levesque@prh.email](mailto:carolyn.levesque@prh.email)**