

Launch Of Virtual Psychiatric Care Helps Pembroke Regional Hospital Ensure Patient Needs Are Met And Care Delivery Is Consistent

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PEMBROKE – Patients requiring psychiatric assessment and follow up at the Pembroke Regional Hospital now have access to virtual care appointments when the circumstances don't allow for in-person sessions.

Prior to the pandemic, all interactions with the hospital's psychiatrists took place in-person on the Acute Mental Health unit or in community-based clinics.

The last two years, however, have been challenging in terms of service delivery and it was evident that in order to sustain timely access to psychiatric care, the hospital had to look at alternative delivery models in the event that COVID-19 prevented in-person visits.

"Going virtual has enabled quick access to psychiatry in certain circumstances. It has also given psychiatrists the ability to meet with patients who are unable to have in-person sessions due to illness," said Mireille Delorme, Director for Mental Health Services of Renfrew County, a program operated by the Pembroke Regional Hospital.

Having a virtual platform on the unit connects patients to services and treatment in their community, and being a regional program, this is important, she said. The virtual platform also allows patients to stay connected with family and friends unable to visit due to COVID-19 restrictions and safety measures.

Prior to setting up the service, Ms. Delorme said her team consulted with other hospitals to see how virtual care was successfully integrated. The team then worked closely with the hospital's Information Technology department to ensure they had the right equipment and that all virtual interactions would be safe, secure and private.

"Privacy is an important part of healthcare and something PRH staff and patients take very seriously," said John Saunders, Director of Information Technology and Chief Information Officer at PRH.

"Although privacy was the main focus for choosing a solution, we also wanted to ensure it was user friendly and not difficult for staff and patients to access. After researching many options along with input from our peer organizations, we decided to use the existing telehealth network that is in place. Our physicians and staff are familiar with its use and it meets all privacy standards by being PHIPA (*Personal Health Information Protection Act*) compliant," he said.

Sabine Mersmann, Senior Vice-President of Clinical and Support Services – Partnerships and Integration said that since implementation in November, 2021, patient response has been positive with many finding the virtual interaction to be user-friendly and "just as good" as in-

person, while staff see the benefits particularly in times when they require quick access to a physician or when an in-person appointment won't be possible.

“Virtual psychiatry has been well received by our patients and has been effective with the support of members of the mental health services team,” said Psychiatrist Dr. Valentine Okechukwu. “An added advantage is the flexibility it offers the psychiatrist to work when due to some reasons physical presence is not possible. On this evidence it may be possible to engage more specialists who may choose to work remotely,” he said.

Ms. Mersmann echoed that sentiment and said now that the technology and processes are in place, there may be other opportunities going forward to use the virtual platform in order to access additional patient services.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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