

Community Connection



Pembroke Regional Hospital COVID-19 Special Edition 2020



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PRH President And CEO Talks About Hospital's Preparedness For COVID-19

This special edition of our public newsletter comes to you during unprecedented times, not only in our local hospital but in our homes and with our families as we all work together to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Thank you for doing your part in preventing the spread of this new virus within our community. Clearly we are beginning to see the results of this great effort.

Just a few short months ago it would have been hard for any of us to predict exactly what was coming, but you can take comfort in the fact that our hospital was well prepared to deal with circumstances such as these. At the first moment of concern, we initiated our internal Incident Management System along with daily meetings of our leadership teams which enabled us to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on our hospital and our local community and to begin to put in place early containment measures. We were provided with early advice from our public health experts and began to closely follow the directives coming from our provincial command centre. We also reached out early to our partners in Ottawa and within Renfrew County to make sure that all of our actions were well aligned and we were maximizing the resources we had available at the time.

We then developed various working groups who focussed on key areas such as screening at entry points, the tracking of supplies, and the targeted reduction of elective procedures in order to create capacity for anticipated COVID-19 activity. We pulled together early and had sound plans in place as we began to see a small number of COVID-19 positive cases come through our doors. Through some good fortune and a lot of hard work, this trickle of early cases did not turn into a stream. And, while we continue to see and to test many patients for COVID-19, as of the time of writing, we have only had two COVID-19 positive cases in our care to date.



Pierre Noel with screening staff Nicolette Jansen, left, and Tressa Crevier, right.

Clearly, the difficult things you have done, staying home, washing your hands frequently and maintaining physical distancing has all helped to contain the spread of COVID-19 in our community. I am so proud of everyone for doing their part!

With the situation being relatively stable in the hospital, we are now directing our energy to supporting the vulnerable population in our long term care and retirement homes and we will be providing our expertise and resources should it be needed in those settings. We have great partners in our health care system and we will be there when they need us.

And, I am so proud of our team at the Pembroke Regional Hospital! Each and every member of our team stepped up and asked how they could help in the early days of preparation for COVID-19. Our staff and our physicians have adapted to fast-paced change and have taken on new roles and assignments without hesitation. They have been innovative, they have demonstrated teamwork, and they have brought all of their skills and talents to the table. Together they have found new ways to deliver care in the face of a pandemic and to maintain a caring and compassionate environment for our patients, and for each other. Our team members have done this despite their worry for their patients, their

health, and the health of the ones they love. Clearly they will be the heroes of this story when it is written!

It is also clear that we have a longer road ahead with COVID-19 but please know that our hospital is a safe place to be if you need care. We have taken every precaution to ensure that those who need to come to the hospital or need urgent care in our emergency department can do so safely.

While some elective procedures have been postponed, many urgent cases are proceeding. Each case is evaluated to ensure that the risk of delay does not compromise the longer term health of our patients. We recognize the stress that some people are feeling at having their appointments postponed but can assure you that as soon as we receive provincial guidance indicating that it is safe to proceed we will begin the process of rescheduling.

We are extremely grateful to our community for their generous support in these challenging times. We've been overwhelmed by your support... from early donations of masks and personal protective equipment, to donations of hand-crafted items for our staff such as surgical caps, headbands and uniform bags, to donations of meals and treats, to the provision of medical equipment and technical expertise, to your financial contributions to the Pembroke Regional Foundation. Please know that everything has been received with heartfelt appreciation.

Thank you to our community and thank you to our fellow first responders and essential workers. Each of you is making a difference in how we are able to respond to this situation. It is by no means an easy task but knowing that we are all in this together and supporting one another, makes it easier to bear. There is no doubt... we will get through this together.

Pembroke Regional Hospital Adapts Service Delivery While Ensuring Safety

Measures put in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have drastically changed the way in which the Pembroke Regional Hospital delivers its services, however the hospital remains ready to provide appropriate care and compassion when you or your loved ones need it.

"The Pembroke Regional Hospital has taken every necessary precaution to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and ensure the health and safety of our patients, staff and physicians," said Sabine Mersmann, Vice-President of Clinical and Support Services/Partnerships and Integration, adding that this includes daily COVID-19 screening for everyone who enters the facility.

"From the outset of this pandemic, we have followed directives from Ontario Health on what services should be scaled back, and what needs to proceed, with priority given to cancer care (including Chemotherapy and Medical Day Care), Mental Health Services, and anything of an acute, urgent nature that, based on physician assessment, could worsen within a 30-day period," Ms. Mersmann said.

Based on those guidelines, the needs of patients within our region continue to be evaluated and assessed on a regular basis.

"We recognize that this is a challenging time for everyone and the postponement of planned medical appointments or procedures can often contribute to the stress and anxiety levels people are feeling," Ms. Mersmann said. "Those of us in health care understand the concerns of our

patients and recognize that even non-urgent appointments are very important to those needing them."

Which is why, when it is safe to do so, Ms. Mersmann said the hospital anticipates being given a green light to gradually ramp up service levels based on priority, with patients being contacted to reschedule.

In the meantime, where alternate arrangements for service delivery can be made, that is taking place. Examples of some of the ways our services are being maintained include the following:

Ambulatory Clinics

Clinic visits are under constant review with patients being contacted if their appointments need to be rescheduled. Some clinic appointments are being done by phone or other remote methods. Patients who still have in-person appointments are being called the day before to be pre-screened.

One great example of how things are continuing is the additional clinic time being provided for our heart failure patients by Dr. Andreas Wielgosz. Dr. Wielgosz is coming to PRH and calling our patients for new consults and follow ups in order to keep these patients safe at home.

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Sabine Mersmann

Pembroke Regional Hospital Adapts Service Delivery...Continued

The Heart Function Clinic's registered nurses are assisting in this process, as is our Telemedicine registered practical nurse. As a result we no longer have a wait list for heart failure patients. They are booked for an appointment by phone within a few weeks of their referral.

Diabetes Education / Geriatric Day Hospital

Communication with clients has been maintained by phone. They have successfully referred patients with chronic health conditions to the Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre for primary care. Also they have maintained some program connection to their patients, troubleshooting prescription issues, answering questions and addressing concerns.

Diagnostic Imaging



Dr. Abe Choi

According to Dr. Abe Choi, Chief of Diagnostic Imaging, while the Diagnostic Imaging department has temporarily stopped performing all elective imaging and non-essential procedures, safety measures have been put in place for those whose appointments are considered urgent. That includes the implementation of physical distancing measures to minimize the risk to staff and patients. All necessary exams are booked one hour apart to decrease patient overlap and seating has been changed in the waiting area to ensure proper physical distancing.

If patients do not wish to come to the hospital for their exam, our clerical staff are happy to reschedule their exam for a future date. However, patients are strongly encouraged to speak with their primary care physician regarding this decision.

Emergency Department

Dr. Tom Hurley, Chief of Staff at Pembroke Regional Hospital says the Emergency Department is still the place to go when you have a serious health concern or need urgent medical care.

"Time is of the essence when treating any condition so now is not the time to ignore symptoms or hesitate if you feel it's an emergency. A delay in seeking care could have a lasting impact on your outcome," Dr. Hurley said.



Dr. Tatiana Jilkina

Chief of Emergency Dr. Tatiana Jilkina said that, despite concerns about COVID-19, heart attacks, stroke, burns, mental health crises, serious falls, seizures, breathing difficulties and other emergencies are still reasons to call 9-1-1 or go to the Emergency Department.

"If patients are experiencing symptoms that, pre-COVID, would have brought them to the Emergency Department, then the Emergency Department or a call to 9-1-1 should still be their number one choice," Dr. Jilkina said.

For those with non-urgent or COVID-related health concerns, people are encouraged to call their family physician or the Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre at 1-844-727-6404.

Mental Health Services of Renfrew County

While the COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically reduced face-to-face access to services, staff are working hard to ensure that clients' needs are met and reduce the need for hospitalization.



Registered Nurse Lisa Keon, left, and Psychiatrist Dr. Debbie Timpson connect with patients via phone.

Since the outbreak of COVID-19 in mid-March, members of Recovery Outreach Program teams in Pembroke, Renfrew and Arnprior have been preparing and delivering frozen meals to clients who are without access to any other community services.

Outreach and case workers continue to connect with clients on a daily basis through telephone wellness checks. As well, the staff are delivering education and recreation packages directly to the clients' doorsteps. Each education kit provides current information and resources relevant to the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal is to keep everyone well informed and increase awareness of local support networks. The customized recreation packages include various coping tools such as craft supplies, puzzles, games, journaling materials and mindfulness exercises to help build resilience and reduce anxiety.

The Geriatric Mental Health Outreach Program which provides comprehensive assessments for people aged 65 and older who are experiencing mental health issues such as reactive behaviours, changes in personality and mood, psychosis, anxiety or memory loss, continues to operate with most assessments completed over the phone. The physician referral process remains the same and in-person assessments will be conducted when it is safe to do so. In addition, GMH staff continue to provide behavioural support to staff in long-term care and retirement homes, as well as hospital settings for individuals suffering from dementia.

Anyone seeking mental health and addictions support and information is asked to call Mental Health Services of Renfrew County at (613) 732-8770, extension 8006 or the Crisis Line at 1-866-966-0991.

Surgical Program

Since the emergence of COVID-19, existing bookings for surgical procedures have been regularly reviewed with priority given to urgent and emergent appointments.

Chief of Surgery Dr. Colleen Haney said the surgeons and hospital have been working in close cooperation to continue to provide timely access to the operating rooms or cancer cases and surgical emergencies.

"Appreciating the threat of COVID-19 to our patients and the community, we have been fully supportive and cooperative with the provincial directions to delay elective surgeries.

Elective work is the bulk of the care we provide and we are working with regional hospitals to have a coordinated and safe resumption of services once the public health officials deem it safe to proceed," Dr. Haney said.

"I can speak for the surgeons when I say we love our work and take great joy and pride in relieving the suffering of an arthritic joint or troublesome gallbladder. We appreciate the suffering associated with the surgical delays. We are working in a new reality and look forward to continuing to provide elective care as soon as we can."

Recently, a limited number of cancer and heart disease related urgent elective procedures have been reinstated in our Diagnostic Imaging department and Surgical Program in order to ensure appropriate and timely access to care for some of our patients.

Decisions on performing additional procedures will be assessed on a weekly basis.



Recovery Outreach Program team members Kristen Purcell (left) and Daphne Wren put the finishing touches on homemade turkey dinners that staff and volunteers delivered to over 80 MHSRC clients on April 8th.



Dr. Tom Hurley



Dr. Colleen Haney

To Protect The Health Of Our Patients And Staff, Visitor Restrictions Are In Place

At the Pembroke Regional Hospital, the safety of our patients and our staff is our top priority. Currently, due to the evolving COVID-19 situation, visitors are not permitted.

Essential visitors will be permitted in circumstances where the patient is dying or is very ill, where the patient is an ill youth or child, where the patient is undergoing surgery or the patient is a woman giving birth.

Our care teams will work with families regarding visits for exceptional circumstances on a compassionate and equitable basis.

For the Maternal Child Care Program:

The designated visitor must be healthy, pass screening and be able to remain in the patient/newborn's room for the duration of the hospital stay. If the designated visitor is unable to attend, the mother can request another support person. The designated visitor cannot rotate/change through the labour process. This includes after delivery and for the recovery period. The designated visitor must stay with the mother/newborn in the room for the entire hospital admission. It's important to plan ahead to ensure that the mother and designated visitor have everything they need during and after the delivery to avoid movement into and out of the patient room. Meals will be provided for the entire stay.

Our hospital values the important role that families and visitors play in supporting patients. We are also committed to the safety of patients, families, and our health care team.

That is why, effective March 22nd, our visitor policy was changed. We understand this change is difficult, and we appreciate how hard it can be to not see your loved ones. As always, our health care team will be there for patients — to smile, to talk, to listen, to care.

PRH is also working with patients and families to encourage and support alternative forms of communication and interaction during this time including virtual and telephone "visits". For those patients who do not have their own electronic devices we are making iPads available to them so that they can connect with family and friends.

We thank you for your understanding at this time and we look forward to being able to welcome visitors back into the hospital when it is safe to do so.



Thank You

The Pembroke Regional Hospital would like to express gratitude to all who have provided support, to date, as we have worked together to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Residents, businesses and organizations throughout Renfrew County have, once again, demonstrated tremendous generosity through donations of personal protective equipment, hand-made items such as surgical caps, headbands and uniform bags, meals and treats for our staff and physicians and financial contributions through our Foundation.

Fellow first responders, partners in health care and others are also deserving of our thanks as are our communities' essential workers and each of you for doing your part in flattening the curve.



The COVID-19 Pandemic: Images From The First Eight Weeks At PRH



*"Whatever we accomplish belongs to our entire group, a tribute to our combined efforts."
Walt Disney*

Donations Will Be Used By Our Hospital Or May Be Shared With Regional Health Care Partners In Need



CALL FOR DONATIONS

OF PPE (PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT)

Pembroke Regional hospital is seeking donations of:


Hand sanitizer


N95 masks


Surgical masks


Latex-free gloves


Disinfectant wipes


Protective eyewear/shields


Level 2 isolation gowns

Donations can be dropped off at the Pembroke Fire Department (200 International Drive) or contact pr@prh.email

Thank You From The PRH Board Of Directors

To the PRH Health Care Team:

On behalf of your Board of Directors, it is with the utmost respect and appreciation that we acknowledge all of your hard work, and dedication to serve the citizens of Pembroke and the surrounding region during this unprecedented global healthcare crisis of COVID-19.



**Board Chair
Garry Yaraskavitch**

The Board recognizes the personal demands placed on each and every one of you, along with the significant expectations on you professionally, to provide the high quality, compassionate care to all the patients coming through the open doors of PRH. The entire team, across all departments, and every area of the hospital, has really risen to the occasion and continues to demonstrate the determination and personal perseverance to serve our community. Your passion to serve others while effectively mitigating your personal health risk exposure, does take special people who are truly committed to their respective profession.

It would be more inspiring if there was a certain future in sight, however, this is an ever-evolving situation and will be a marathon effort on all fronts. How we navigate the upcoming weeks and months ahead, will most certainly contribute to better health outcomes and further evolutions in the delivery of healthcare locally and around the world.

We also acknowledge that the reality of this situation is impacting you personally, along with your family and friends, as it is impacting the lives of everyone else, and yet you continue to provide the essential services to the health and wellbeing of the many lives you touch each and every day. We want to thank you for all that you continue to do to keep patients, families, staff, and our greater community safe during this time.

Once again, it is with heartfelt gratitude that we thank every one of you.

Ethics And COVID-19 by Ethicist Dr. Hazel Markwell

We are often hearing that this pandemic has changed everything. It is true that the clinical situation has demanded significant changes in how we are responding to the virus, our mitigation strategies etc. However, as physician and bioethicist Dan Sulmasy noted in a recent webinar, the pandemic does not and should not change our ethical principles. In fact, we need these more than ever right now.

Ethics continues to be alive and well at Pembroke Regional Hospital, albeit remotely. While the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in having to consider specific ethical issues related to allocation of scarce resources, restricting visitors and the duty to care, these deliberations continue to be grounded in our values of compassion and caring, excellence and innovation, social and fiscal responsibility, sacredness of life, mutual respect and community spirit.

As well as the specific ethical issues related to the pandemic, the "regular work" of ethics is continuing, both in terms of committee work and also issues related to how to provide the best patient care. Over the last several months we

have given educational sessions on advance care planning, consent to treatment, stigma and mental illness to name a few.

The pandemic has not and will not jeopardize the ethical principles which provide the foundation for these discussions.

COVID -19 has reminded us of the fragility of human life, that we are in fact our neighbors' keepers, that we need each other in ways we may not have imagined or had forgotten before this pandemic.

We see in so many small and big ways that we are willing to alter our lives to keep ourselves and others safe, when this pandemic is over, perhaps these lessons will result in a kinder, more gentle society in which we will not just have "flattened the curve" by altering our behaviors in order to protect ourselves and others, but in doing so might also remember that we are most fully human when we care for each other.



Dr. Hazel Markwell

A Heartfelt Message From The PRH Patient and Family Advisory Council


On behalf of the non-medical contingent of the Patient and Family Advisory Council of the PRH - to all staff and administration at the Pembroke Regional Hospital - a sincere, heartfelt "THANK YOU" for all your efforts during this pandemic.

Your dedication to providing appropriate and consistent care to the members of our community is greatly appreciated.


Please realize we acknowledge the stressful nature of your work and wish for your continued safety through to the conclusion of this crisis.



**Co-Chair
Richard Sheppard**



RESIDENT OF RENFREW COUNTY







COVID-19

IF YOU HAVE A HEALTH CONCERN

AND DO NOT HAVE A FAMILY PHYSICIAN

OR CAN'T ACCESS YOUR FAMILY PHYSICIAN


 FAMILY PHYSICIAN
 NURSE PRACTITIONER
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1-844-727-6404

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Renfrew County Virtual Triage and Assessment Centre

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Pembroke Regional Hospital Foundation / Fondation de l'Hôpital Régional de Pembroke

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