A Letter to our Community about COVID-19
September 16, 2020

The weather is beginning to cool and the leaves are starting to change, and here at Waypoint work is underway to prepare for the unknown while we continue to deliver essential mental health care in a safe and secure environment.

We are fortunate that we have not had any patient cases to date. We attribute this largely to the dedication and commitment of our staff in adhering to infection prevention and control practices as well as the numerous other safety protocols in place such as universal masking, screening, hand hygiene, and a dedicated isolation unit to care for all newly admitted and symptomatic patients awaiting COVID-19 test results.

Planning for services in a pandemic environment

When the pandemic hit, we adjusted our inpatient programs and suspended the voluntary Georgianwood mental health and addiction program because of physical spacing needs.

As restrictions continue to lift and we prepare for a potential second wave, our focus is now on safely re-establishing services and supports that were suspended or modified because of COVID-19.

This work requires changes to services and care delivery processes, as well as use of space to meet public health measures like physical distancing. As we work through recovery planning while providing a safe, high-quality treatment environment, our priorities include:

Patient Visits
We were pleased to able to reintroduce limited visitation at the end of July. Visitors must adhere to all infection control practices and visits must be scheduled in advance. Knowing how important visiting with loved ones is in the recovery journey, our team is working on plans to move to Phase 3 of reintroducing visitors which would include more frequent visits and more designated visitors for some patients.

Continuing virtual care and reestablishing necessary in-person counselling
At the outset of the pandemic, we transitioned to virtual care for many of our outpatients; increasing the use of the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN) from approximately 300/month pre-COVID to almost 1,100/month. While this type of care has many benefits, it is not always the best option. Our team continues to offer virtual care when it makes sense while planning is underway to reestablish necessary in-person care safely.

Re-establishing services and supports that were closed due to COVID
We are pleased to share that dentistry and hair care has returned, with chiropody and physiotherapy close behind. Our team is working on how to plan to re-establish concurrent disorder services and our Forensic Assessment Program B. These plans will take into consideration how best to support system pressures while meeting government requirements to have a maximum of four patients per room, as
well as our staffing situation while we continue to operate the isolation unit and the local COVID-19 Assessment Centre.

Working with our partners to maintain the local Assessment Centre
Waypoint continues to work with Georgian Bay General Hospital and other local partners on providing COVID testing to the community at the Midland Assessment Centre. Planning continues for how this service will continue as hospitals and partners begin to ramp up their services.

Conducting research on the impact of the pandemic
In partnership with Georgian College, we are undertaking a research study to benefit healthcare workers in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. ECHOES or Effects of COVID-19 on Healthcare Providers: Opportunities for Education and Support, is a study designed to learn more about healthcare providers experiences with the pandemic and how these impact them and their professional practice.

Updating our Pandemic Plan and ensuring we are ready for a second wave
A large team of leaders and staff have been assessing what worked well in the last six months of our pandemic response and how we will carry forward these actions for on-going surges or a second wave of COVID cases. Much of this work is focused on review of the existing Influenza Pandemic Plan to ensure it is representative of a more generic pandemic response – the four phases of a pandemic and different actions/activities you can expect would be occurring during each phase.

As we work through the significant challenges presented by COVID-19, infection prevention and control remains a priority at our Penetanguishene and Midland sites and for our staff and clients in the community.

We are immensely grateful to our staff working to deliver crucial mental health care, and to the many businesses, community groups, donors and staff who have donated to Waypoint during this time.

Please remember if you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, please be diligent in self-isolation and get tested if you need to.

If you are experiencing concerns about your mental health, please know that you are not alone. Sometimes we don’t know exactly what we need, or we’re unsure of what someone can offer, that’s okay — that shouldn’t discourage us from reaching out. We also need to remember that people who are struggling do not always reach out – so maybe we can reach in. Check in on your friends and neighbours, ask them how they’re doing today. It’s such a small thing but it can help us stay connected in this different world we’re living in. If you have friends in health care who are struggling, COVID Frontline Wellness is there for them. Visit our page for more information.

Please continue to do your part – wash your hands, practice physical distancing and stay home when possible. Please also practice compassion and kindness, we can all use a little more of this. We will get through this together.

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