A message to our community – October 28, 2020

As pandemic restrictions continue and the number of cases rise across the province and the country, our hospital is focusing on infection prevention and control, safely re-establishing services and supports that were suspended or modified because of COVID-19, and supporting our staff and other healthcare workers with mental wellness and coping support. Waypoint continues to have zero patient cases and has only had one staff case, now many months ago.

When the pandemic hit, restrictions were imposed quickly. Bringing these services back respecting all the public health measures and infection prevention and control practices is a much bigger task. Our hospital is working as quickly as we can while we closely monitor COVID-19 activity. Our priorities include:

**Patient Visits**
Visiting with loved ones is an important part of the mental health recovery journey. We are currently welcoming visitors on a limited basis. Visitors must adhere to all infection control practices and visits must be scheduled in advance. We are closely monitoring COVID-19 activity in the community and may need to make changes to our practices if cases continue to rise, or at the recommendation of government directives. Virtual visiting using the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN) continues to be an option.

**Continuing virtual care and reestablishing necessary in-person counselling**
Transitioning to virtual care for many of our outpatients provided an option to continue this important care. While it has had many benefits, it isn’t always the best option for every client. Our outpatient and community teams are returning to face-to-face visits for some clients using all the necessary infection prevention and control precautions.

**Re-establishing services and supports that were closed due to COVID**
Chiropody, dentistry, hair care, physiotherapy and the denturist have all returned to offer these important services. Some concurrent disorders services are slated to return this winter. To meet system pressures we are increasing the Bayview Dual Diagnosis Program by two beds and our provincial forensic assessment beds and acute assessment beds by four. Future planning must continue to consider how best to support system pressures while meeting government requirements for a maximum of four patients per room, as well as our staffing situation while we continue to operate the isolation unit and partner in the Midland COVID-19 Assessment Centre.

**Finding ways to support our staff through research**
While Waypoint already had robust psychological, health, safety, and wellness programming, at the outset of the pandemic we increased access to resiliency workshops, enhanced traumatic incident support, and offered coping and wellness support. With an eye toward future supports, the Waypoint Research Institute also began two projects in partnership with Georgian College to benefit healthcare workers.

ECHOES or Effects of COVID-19 on Healthcare Providers: Opportunities for Education and Support is a two-part project that will first seek to understand how the pandemic is impacting the
work of healthcare providers, and second, to use these results to develop education and supports to improve wellness and abilities.

The second study centers around mindfulness training, and researching how effective a condensed online four-week version of the curriculum compares to a 12-week face-to-face version previously offered at the hospital by Mindfulness Without Borders.

Ultimately, the researchers hope the skills developed throughout these programs will improve the mental wellbeing and resiliency of frontline workers throughout the pandemic and into the future.

**Updating our Pandemic Plan and ensuring we are ready for a second wave**

Our existing pandemic plan got an overhaul by a large team of leaders and staff who assessed our response to the pandemic thus far, and used these lessons learned to make sure we are prepared for ongoing surges of COVID-19 cases. The updated plan contains a more generic pandemic response and outlines the four phases of a pandemic and the different actions/activities that would occur during each phase.

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We are all living through something that our generation has never experienced – at least not for this long – and we don’t know how much longer it will last. As we work through these significant challenges, we are committed to patient and staff safety.

I urge you to continue to your part - wash your hands, practice physical distancing and stay home when possible. And, as we enter flu season, please get your flu shot, this your best defense against the flu.

If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, please be diligent in self-isolation and get tested if you need to. If you have concerns about your mental health, please know that you are not alone. Talk to your family physician, make an appointment at the virtual walk-in clinic, call your local crisis line, or visit the emergency room if you are in a crisis. You can also visit www.211Ontario.ca to find mental health and addiction supports. If you or anyone you know in healthcare are struggling, COVID Frontline Wellness is available. Visit [www.waypointcentre.ca/programs_and_services/c_o_v_i_d_frontline_wellness](http://www.waypointcentre.ca/programs_and_services/c_o_v_i_d_frontline_wellness) for more information.

In these challenging times, we are also accepting donations for the Waypoint COVID-19 Mental Health Relief Fund. With people facing increased hardship, loss, anxiety and a sense of helplessness due to the pandemic, the COVID-19 Mental Health Relief Fund will make it possible for our hospital to adapt to the emerging needs of people struggling with mental health and addiction issues in the community, in the hospital, and in the future. Please give, so no one gives up. [www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/waypoint-centre-for-mental-health-care/campaign/covid-19-mental-health-relief-fund](http://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/waypoint-centre-for-mental-health-care/campaign/covid-19-mental-health-relief-fund)

Be sure you are looking after yourself and practicing compassion and kindness. We will get through this together.

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