



NORTHUMBERLAND HILLS HOSPITAL

Senior Leadership Report to the Board December 2021

Quality and Safety

COVID-19 Vaccine Policy Update

NHH's COVID-19 Vaccine Policy went into effect on September 7, 2021, with an eight-week implementation period. All staff, physicians, and midwives are now required to provide proof of full vaccination against COVID-19 (full vaccination is currently defined as two doses, per Public Health Ontario) or an acceptable and documented medical reason for not being vaccinated. Contractors, students and volunteers are required to attest to the same.

While we were disappointed that the Province of Ontario has not proceeded to make COVID-19 vaccination mandatory for all health-care workers, as it has for those working in long-term care, we're pleased to report that there continues to be strong support at NHH for mandatory vaccination against COVID-19.

As of November 26, a small number, less 10 staff members (the majority from non-patient-facing areas), were not compliant with our COVID-19 Vaccine Policy. Those individuals remain on a temporary leave of absence pending vaccination. It is important to note, while health human resources remain a challenge for hospitals across the province, including NHH (see below), COVID-19 vaccination has not been a material factor in our local health human resource staffing—indeed, we see it as a critical step to protect the important resources we have.

The evidence for vaccination is clear—being vaccinated is a further layer of protection against COVID-19, for ourselves, for those who rely on us for care and our community at large.

COVID-19 Booster Roll-Out

On November 3, 2021, the Ontario government, in consultation with the Chief Medical Officer of Health, announced it would be expanding eligibility for booster doses of the COVID-19 vaccine to additional groups of high-risk individuals., including hospital workers, providing at least six months have passed since their last dose. Booster doses are currently being selectively offered to higher risk groups in Ontario based on evidence of gradually waning immunity and a higher risk of severe illness.

A working group was struck at NHH to coordinate the booster vaccine rollout to hospital staff and physicians. Using a mix of pre-scheduled and walk-in clinics delivered weekdays from November 16 through November 26, 340 booster doses were administered at NHH, at an average rate of 37/per day.

Special thanks to our partners in the NHH Auxiliary who provided use of the Auxiliary workroom for the two-week clinic.

A second round of booster clinics will be offered at NHH early in the new year. Any staff members, physicians or midwives who meet the eligibility criteria and wish to proceed with the booster before the January clinics can register on the COVID-19 vaccination portal for the nearest vaccination appointment.

Booster vaccines are not considered mandatory at this time. 'Fully vaccinated,' as described in NHH's COVID-19 vaccine policy, and verified by local Public Health authorities, continues to mean two doses received. It is expected that this may be revisited in future.

Influenza Vaccination Campaign Continues

Launched this year on October 18, NHH's annual vaccination campaign for staff, physicians and midwives took the form of a series of daily clinics offered in two locations: the Occupational Health and Safety Office and the stairwell adjacent to the Main Street Bistro. Evening clinics were hosted as well through November and flu vaccination was also offered to staff, physicians and midwives attending the recent COVID-19 booster clinic.

Occupational Health RN Ellen Douglas reports that, as of November 29, 2021, her office has recorded delivery of 261 influenza vaccinations. This figure does not capture those who received their vaccination elsewhere (e.g. from their family physician or community flu clinic). This information will be included, in so far as it is available, when NHH submits its report on influenza vaccination to Public Health later in December.

Flu vaccine will continue to be available through the Occupational Health office into the new year with everyone who is able strongly encouraged to receive a vaccination.

Using Blood Wisely Designation Awarded to Northumberland Hills Hospital

Choosing Wisely Canada and Canadian Blood Services have designated Northumberland Hills Hospital as a "Using Blood Wisely Hospital." In a November 11, 2021 letter addressed to NHH Chief of Staff Mukesh Bhargava, President and CEO Susan Walsh, and Dr. Hetal Talati, Pathologist, Laboratory Medicine, the organizations congratulated the hospital team on the achievement.

The Using Blood Wisely Hospital designation symbolizes a commitment to red blood cell stewardship and to the continuous pursuit of quality improvement. In achieving this designation, Northumberland Hills Hospital is among a select group of hospitals that are making a difference for patients, donors, and Canada's blood supply.

Choosing Wisely Canada and Canadian Blood Services commended Northumberland Hills Hospital and the staff and physician team for "excellent work in reducing unnecessary red blood cell transfusions." In conveying the news to Dr. Hetal Talati, Pathologist, Laboratory Medicine, Peterborough Regional Health System (NHH's partner hospital for Laboratory services), Dr. Bhargava said: "Congratulations to you and the blood bank team for being such gentle, and persistent advocates for using higher blood resources wisely."

"I am so proud of the motivated lab staff, physicians and nurses, for all their efforts and willingness to follow best practice guidelines," said Dr. Talati.

Accreditation 2022 – "Our Time to Shine"

Delayed due to COVID-19, NHH is looking forward to its next Accreditation Canada review, now confirmed for March 6-10, 2022.

Last completed in 2017, Accreditation is an opportunity to recognize and celebrate excellence, as well as a means of identifying opportunities for improvement. The voluntary exercise demonstrates an organization's commitment to meet the highest standards of care delivery. Assessment is completed using a variety of tools, including evaluation of NHH's Quality Improvement Framework, an on-site survey (set for March, 2022), a review of priority processes across the hospital, direct observations, interviews and an analysis of policies and related documentation.

NHH will be evaluated against a set of "Required Organizational Practices"—essential practices that organizations must have in place to enhance patient safety and minimize risk—across six safety areas. As of January 2021, those areas are: Safety Culture, Communication, Medication Use, Worklife/Workforce, Infection Control and Risk Assessment.

Work is now underway on a series of self-assessments required by Accreditation Canada, including the Patient Safety Culture Survey. Further updates will be shared as the Review date draws closer.

Great Place to Work and Volunteer

Action Plan to Address Shortages in Health Human Resources

NHH's human resources department continues to grapple with a rising shortage of health human resources across multiple departments, programs and professions. While delivery of services has not been affected, the burden of the shortage on existing team members who continue to 'step up' to take on the necessary duties is significant and not sustainable, particularly in light of the strain caused by the sustained pandemic.

Of the total number of permanent positions available at NHH, the percent of vacancies has risen from 2.2 per cent in Q3, 2020/21 to 4.5 per cent in Q2 2021/22. Multiple reasons exist for the increase, including increased competition for limited resources; the 'great resignation' (departures attributed to COVID-19 fatigue); and, a net increase in the number of new NHH positions, particularly in the area of critical care.

An action plan to address the situation was developed by NHH Human Resources. The plan, now being implemented, includes offers of paid education, participation in Ontario's Community Commitment Program for Nurses (a partnership with Health Force Ontario), targeted student recruitment (including internships and offers of support for new graduate debt repayment), introduction of an externship program (highlighted in the October 2021 Board Report), enhanced social media advertising, and a review of retention strategies.

In addition to local efforts within NHH, NHH senior leadership continue to work with the Ontario Hospital Association as well as regional and provincial government partners to raise visibility of the challenge and advocate for the advancement of provincial solutions.

NHH Remembers

On Thursday, November 11, two Remembrance Day ceremonies were held for Post Acute Specialty Services inpatients and all other inpatients and staff members who are able to attend. The first took place at 11:30 AM in the In-Patient Rehabilitation dining room; the second followed at 1PM on the opposite side of the dining room for Restorative Care patients. Light refreshments were served and patients who are able were invited to place poppies on the memorial wreath placed in the Rotary Courtyard. Special thanks to Recreation Therapists Amy Ludolph and Elaine Valles for coordinating. As is our tradition, NHH also observed a minute of silence at 11AM on November 11th to honour the sacrifice of those who have fallen in the service of their country, and to acknowledge the courage of those who still serve. Sticker poppies, supplied by the local Legion, were distributed to all inpatients on their meal trays earlier that morning. New this year: our Canada Flag was flown at half-mast on two dates: November 8, in special recognition of [National Indigenous Veterans' Day](#), and again on November 11 for [Remembrance Day](#).

Thank You to our Courtyard Elves

NHH's Rotary Courtyard is once again sporting a wonderful holiday season display, complete with a hand-made train, gingerbread houses and lights – lots of lights! This very special tradition, carried out by a small but very ambitious team of local volunteers coordinated through the NHH Foundation, is appreciated every year, but through the pandemic it seems to have taken on even more importance. The bright lights and the festive mood sparked by the volunteers' creations is appreciated by staff and patients alike. Thank you to all involved for the joy this kind and generous tradition brings to NHH.

Susan Walsh Chairing 2021 Light Up a Life Campaign

The Rotary Courtyard is not the only thing our Foundation is lighting up this season – the NHH Foundation's annual Light Up a Life Campaign is also under way and NHH President and CEO Susan Walsh is pleased to serve as Chair.

First introduced in 1994, the annual Light Up a Life campaign has raised more than \$3.2 million and funded a variety of equipment for NHH over the years – everything from surgical scopes, to anaesthetic machines, hospital beds, and the MRI.

“From the moment I walked through the front doors for my first interview, NHH felt special to me; it was clear this is a community hospital in every sense of the word, with our community’s heart reflected throughout,” said Susan in the Foundation’s recent media release. “Our hospital is an anchor in our community. It’s no secret Northumberland County is growing, and to keep pace with our changing needs, so too must NHH.”

The focus of this year’s campaign is to fund cardiac monitors and a new central monitoring system for the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).

To learn more about Light Up a Life, and read Susan’s letter to the community, please visit the [NHH Foundation website](#).

Collaborative Community Partnerships

NHH and Port Hope Police Service unveil new painting spotlighting integrated M-HEART service

A strong partnership between Northumberland Hills Hospital’s Community Mental Health Service and the Port Hope Police Service (PHPS) was highlighted in November, 2021, with the delivery of a painting now hanging in the PHPS building at 55 Fox Road, Port Hope.

Jointly commissioned by the hospital’s community mental health team and the PHPS, the 1X1.5- metre piece is the work of multidisciplinary artist [Michelle Akil](#). A graduate of Centennial College and the Ontario College of Art and Design University, her work in this instance is spotlighting a small service that has already had a big impact on the Port Hope community in the three years since its introduction.

Strategically displayed in the Community Room of the PHPS, the brightly coloured mixed media scene depicts the image of a youth, head in hands, sitting on the ground beside a Port Hope Police cruiser with a male member of the M-HEART team bending down to assist. “The backdrop of the scene is a mural with imagery that includes indigenous, LGBTQ2+ and other symbolism representing inclusivity, together with a mix of urban and rural landscapes,” said Akil. “It is meant to provoke awareness of inclusion, diversity and breaking barriers, and another way to continue the discussion of mental health overall.”

M-HEART—the acronym stands for Mental Health Engagement and Response Team—has been a fixture of the PHPS since the late fall of 2018, shortly after it was introduced in the region thanks to new funding from the then Central East Local Health Integration Network (now [Ontario Health East](#)). Similar M-HEART teams are also in place at both the Northumberland OPP and the Cobourg Police Service.

“While we are a police agency, only 20 percent of our service calls to the Port Hope Police Service are actually for criminal activity,” said **Bryant Wood, Chief of Police**, in the joint release. “Eighty percent of the calls we get are actually what I call society issues. People needing help, quickly, and many of those are associated with mental health needs. By pairing an NHH Mental Health Nurse with an existing Mental Health Response and Liaison Officer from our service, we have found that we can get care quickly and directly to those who need it most, when they need it.”

Mobile crisis intervention is one way the local police service is working with their hospital partners to better connect those in need with the services available in the community. System-level benefits are being seen as a result of the M-HEART program, from the development and implementation of coordinated care plans, empowering client and their families to participate in care planning while keeping members of the support system informed. In 2021 calls to M-HEART increased by 169 per cent over 2020, with 63 per cent more unique individuals served from year to year and a 65 per cent increase in emergency department diversions, meaning that 65 per cent more calls were able to be managed in the community rather than resulting in a hospital emergency department visit.

“This program is a win for all involved,” added Chief Wood. “First and foremost, it’s good for the people we’re here to serve, it’s good for our police service, as it brings specialized mental health skills to the street where they’re needed most, and it’s good for the local health care system, by reducing crisis visits to the Emergency Department. With continued government support, we look forward to building on the strength of the M-HEART model in the months and years ahead, and expanding access through increased resources in Port Hope cruisers.”

For more on MHEART and the art project please [see the related media release on our website](#).

Monthly Northumberland PACE Talks Paused to the New Year

The Northumberland PACE Talk series returned briefly last month for the 2021/22 season with a wonderful panel discussion exploring the *Physician-Patient Interaction - The Changing Landscape for Better Care*.

Typically held on the 3rd Wednesday of the month at 5:30 PM, Northumberland PACE talks will pause for the months of November and December due to competing priorities and return again the third Wednesday of January.

Find details and a link at www.pacetalks.com and on the NHH and PACE partner social media channels in the new year.

Community Partner Focus Group to Support Cobourg Police Service Strategic Planning

NHH was pleased to be invited to participate in the focus group phase of a strategic planning process currently underway for the Cobourg Police Service (CPS). Hosted at Venture13, the session, attended by President and CEO Susan Walsh and Jennifer Gillard, Senior Director Public Affairs and Strategic Partnerships, allowed community partners to provide input into the Cobourg Police Service's 2022-2024 strategic plan. Facilitated by a third party, the event brought together a range of community partners for open dialogue around shared challenges and priorities. In addition to supporting the CPS planning, the event was also an important opportunity for NHH to listen and learn from area partners.

Operational Excellence

Central East Ontario Hospitals Coming Together to Introduce Single, Unified Digital Health Record for Patients

In a joint media release distributed November 24, NHH and six other partner hospital organizations, representing 14 hospitals in Central East Ontario, confirmed that we will soon introduce Epic – a new, digital clinical information system (CIS) that will provide a single, unified personal health record for each patient.

The new Epic CIS will go live at Northumberland Hills Hospital, Campbellford Memorial Hospital, Haliburton Highlands Health Services, Lakeridge Health, Peterborough Regional Health Centre, Ross Memorial Hospital, and Scarborough Health Network. This collaboration represents the largest number of individual organizations joining together on Epic in Ontario and will transform the way health care is delivered for generations to come.

“Epic is a gamechanger for Central East Ontario,” said Dr. Ilan Lenga, Chief Information Officer and Chief Medical Information Officer at Lakeridge Health, who is also leading the regional Epic team. “It will vastly improve the way we deliver care across Central East Ontario for generations to come.”

“For the first time, patients, families and their entire Central East care teams will have real-time access to hospital-related health information in one place,” said Susan Walsh, President and CEO of Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH). “A partnership of this magnitude is unprecedented for our hospital. Because of this collaboration—and the support of our local team, physician partners and community—the transformation to our

new Epic CIS has been possible. I thank everyone involved. We are very excited about our Epic transformation and the benefits it will bring to our hospital and our region.”

Epic will provide health-care teams with the tools they need to better collaborate across the region and enable them to make the best possible decisions about an individual’s care and treatment. In addition, there will be increased access to real-time information that will help to improve patient outcomes, and access to standardized tools and processes that will reduce duplication, streamline processes, and improve results.

The launch of Epic will also include a new MyChart Central East Ontario patient portal that is integrated with the Epic system. This free, secure, online portal will allow patients to access their medical records and personal health information. Patients can register for the new MyChart patient portal beginning December 3, 2021 by visiting mychart.ourepic.ca.

As our teams transition to this faster, safer, and better way to deliver care, patients and families may initially notice longer than usual wait times and some processes that are done differently. We appreciate our community’s patience and understanding as our teams make this important change to serve them better.

Epic is one of the world’s largest electronic health records software companies. The best-in-class clinical information system has been adopted by hundreds of leading hospitals in North America and Europe, including the Mayo Clinic, Cleveland Clinic, The Ottawa Hospital, SickKids, and others.

East Region Recovery and Response Table Established by Ontario Health

Central East Region Hospital CEOs were recently notified of the creation of a new working group that will be put in place to support the hospitals and patient care in the East Region in this post-pandemic period.

During the COVID-19 waves 3 and 4, the East Region had an Incident Management System (IMS) in place to support hospitals with surge related to acute care and critical care capacity. The IMS was officially retired in October as the numbers of COVID-19 numbers declined in the East Region. With COVID-19 numbers beginning to climb, rising gaps in health human resources and increasing numbers of alternate level of care (ALC) patients requiring acute care beds, Ontario Health has implemented a Recovery Plan with working groups in each region, including the East, to support long-term planning and the development and implementation of short-term supports.

Like the IMS structure before it, the OH East Region Hospital Recovery Response Table will have membership from each of the region’s ‘hub’ hospitals in Lakeridge, Peterborough, Kingston and Ottawa. Challenges or crisis at any East Region hospital will be forwarded to the OH East Region Hospital Recovery Response Table. Discussions will then quickly be facilitated between the regional hospital and the respective hub hospital to best manage resources to maintain patient care and flow.

Update - Roof Repair and Replacement

The repair and replacement of the NHH roof is now 95 per cent complete. Delays caused by inclement weather through the summer and fall meant that the final segment of the project could not be completed before temperatures dipped below the required levels. Work will resume on the remaining section in the spring as soon as conditions permit. In the meantime, contractors will continue to be seen working at NHH through the cooler months completing the metal flashing or ‘capping’ along the border of the roof line.

Supported in part by a \$1,005,000 Health Infrastructure Renewal Fund investment, the project is part of a \$2.5-million repair and replacement upgrade.