

Patients experiencing increased lengths of stay in NHH ED – multiple solutions at work to address patient flow

The Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH) Emergency Department (ED) receives close to 35,000 visitors each year. The 'front door' of our hospital, in terms of patient flow, is a very busy place, staffed by a dedicated team of health care professionals who work hard day and night to help you and your loved ones get the emergency care you need as quickly as possible.

As a hospital we have a duty to ensure we are meeting our obligation to deliver safe, quality care within the resources available. As such, we pay close attention to patient activity. In addition to the overall number of visits, our teams monitor a range of quality indicators like the types of care required by the patients who visit our Emergency Department, how quickly they are seen, and how quickly they are either discharged or admitted.

In the past 12 months, both the quality indicators and the experience of ED staff, physicians and patients, are pointing to some significant system pressures. The issue is not increasing volumes, which are steady, but, rather, challenges with patient flow into and out of the hospital.

As a result, patient lengths of stay within the ED, reported publicly on Ontario's Wait Time website (www.ontariowaittimes.com), are growing longer, both for patients with complex conditions and those with minor or uncomplicated conditions. While 12 months ago NHH compared well with waits at other hospitals in our region, in recent months the length of patient stays in our ED have increased. There are a number of causes and solutions.

First, some of the causes. These include:

- an increasing number of patients (so called ALC or Alternate Level of Care patients) who need to remain in hospital—due to lack of available alternatives in our region—even though they no longer require acute care
- with more ALC patients, fewer physical beds available for acute patients who are awaiting admission from the ED, and a requirement that these patients remain in the ED until a bed becomes available
- a growing and aging population, and a need for more health services as we age
- a challenging flu season; and
- rising volumes of patients presenting to the NHH ED with less minor or uncomplicated conditions.

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What of the solutions? As an organization NHH is applying many strategies to reduce our ED wait times.

The most significant is funding to support the recent opening of 11, temporary acute inpatient beds thanks to the support of our Local Health Integration Network and the Ministry of Health. While it's too soon in our Wait Time reporting to see the impact of these additional beds, we expect that they will have a positive impact on improved flow through our organization.

As patients and/or caregivers, we should always consider Emergency Department alternatives, and make use of these for non-emergency situations, as appropriate.

- Access family doctors or community clinics for non-emergency health concerns. A number of local family physicians now operate after-hour clinics, accessible to their patients only. Check to see if your family physician has an after-hour service in place. If your situation is non-urgent, and your family physician isn't available, you can also:
 - ✓ Get free telephone access to a Registered Nurse 24 hours a day, 7 days a week through the **Telehealth Ontario** service at 1-866-797-0000 (TTY 1-866-797-0007).
 - ✓ Visit the **Port Hope Walk-In Clinic** at 99 Toronto Road, Port Hope (2nd floor). The Clinic (905-885-0611) is open six days a week (excluding Fridays), from 10AM to 4PM, at the discretion of the physician on duty.
 - ✓ Visit the **Central East Local Health Integration Network's HealthLine website** at www.centraleasthealthline.ca for a detailed listing of health and community services across our region.

Rest assured, the NHH ED is here when you need it. We cannot and we will not turn people away. Our focus will always be on ensuring timely delivery of quality care to the most urgent patients first and, each in turn, to all others who seek our care as well. Thank you for choosing NHH and for your patience as we work with our local and regional partners to improve patient flow into, through and out of the hospital.

NHH says thank you to Dr. Jay Amin



A long-standing physician leader at NHH, Dr. Jay Amin retired this month after 37 years of dedicated service to her community. Most recently the Department Chief and Quality and Practice Committee Co-Chair for Post-Acute Specialty Services (PASS), Dr. Amin's contributions to NHH have been extensive, including work with the Maternal/Child Quality and Practice Committee, the Medical Advisory Committee and Scheduling Lead for the Physician On-Call Group. Dr. Amin has also been a dedicated supporter of the NHH Foundation for many years.

At her final meeting of the PASS Quality and Practice Committee (above), Dr. Amin was recently recognized by the team for her care and commitment, both to this hospital and those we serve.

For more on Dr. Amin, and Dr. Carla Sabatini, who has been recruited to Northumberland to assume her practice in the community, including hospital privileges, please see the related announcement from the Community Physician Recruitment and Retention Committee at www.northumberlanddocs.com.