

2018 Provincial Election—Six Health Care Issues to Consider Raising with Northumberland-Peterborough South Candidates

Election day in Ontario is Thursday, June 7th. Many issues will be debated before the polls open, but none touch each of us, and our loved ones, as directly as health care. In the lead up to this election, the Board of Directors of Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH) has compiled the following list of six health care issues relevant to high quality care in our community.

Long-term sustainable funding, for our hospital care and our partners

- Recent health care investments announced for Northumberland—including an injection to base funding for NHH, dollars to support a new 6-bed Northumberland Hospice Care Centre and the approval for 29 new long-term care beds at the Golden Plough Lodge—are essential for maintaining timely access to quality care here in our community.
- This funding must be sustained.
- Significant, long-term investments in our health care system will be required to meet rising local need, including primary care, home and community care, acute care, mental health care and long-term care.

Capacity planning, to adequately serve hospital patients now and in the future

- As we age, we require more health care.
- Ontario has been growing and aging at a rapid pace, but funding for the health-related costs of this aging has not kept up with growth.
- At the same time, costs to deliver services have increased substantially (staffing costs, drug/supply costs and utility costs, to name a few).
- NHH has struggled to keep pace, with staff stretched to their limits and no dollars to set aside for needed infrastructure and equipment upgrades.
- In a few short years, the largest number of baby boomers will be at an age across Ontario when the most health services are required.
- Here in Northumberland this massive influx of patients over 65 is now on our doorstep, adding even more strain to a system that is already over capacity. Urgent attention to long-term capacity planning is essential if we are going to adequately prepare for the patients who will rely on us for care in the future – young and old.

Additional support for those who no longer require acute care, but can't live safely at home

- Everyone deserves to know that the Emergency Department (ED) is there should they need it.
- As Ontario's hospitals have stretched to operate at capacity levels well over 100%, ED wait times have grown longer.
- Medium-sized hospitals like NHH are particularly challenged to keep up with demand. Patients simply have nowhere else to go.
- While many factors influence ED wait times, none is more significant than patient flow – the ability for a hospital to admit, treat and flow patients through.
- Hospitals have no control over the volume of patients coming in to their ED, or how sick those individuals may be.
- In the past year, more patients have been coming in to NHH requiring an admission than we are able to safely discharge out.
- At times, 30% of the available acute care beds at NHH have been occupied by patients designated as "ALC" (Alternate Level of Care).
- These patients, to no fault of their own, have completed their acute care hospital stay, and are waiting for a space to open in a more suitable setting in their community.
- Most ALC patients are waiting for a long-term care bed, but our region has some of the longest waits for long-term care in the province.
- Others require more home care than the current system can provide.
- Urgent attention to long-term care capacity will ease the current ALC dilemma, reduce wait times and improve patient flow.

Local access to primary care

- Primary care is the anchor in our system, and ready access is essential.
- In recent years, local investments in collaborative primary care practices such as the Northumberland Family Health Team and the Port Hope Northumberland Community Health Centre have helped to improve access to local family doctors, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, allied health professionals and dental care.
- But accessing primary care when we need it is not always possible, and the fallback is the local Emergency.
- Primary care resources are essential for our community, as is the collaboration between primary health care partners, hospitals and home and community supports. Continued investment in these partners and partnerships will be important.

Opportunities for health literacy, wellness, and illness prevention

- Each of us has a responsibility when it comes to our own health care, but there are inconsistencies in terms of access.
- Efforts to ensure all Northumberland residents, regardless of income, have the information, opportunity and support to make healthy choices will help prevent illness and, by extension, support the system's overall capacity in the years ahead.
- The Basic Income Guarantee, now being piloted in Ontario, offers a promising new option for Ontarians living in low-income situations. Income is the leading determinant of health.
- NHH welcomed the province's commitment to test this concept, and we look forward to learning more about improvements it may show for both short- and long-term health and other outcomes for recipients.

A commitment to community resources to support transportation, wellness checks, meals on wheels and more

- Many families are not equipped to carry the care responsibilities expected of them, particularly when it comes to aging parents and loved ones.
- Community care resources fill the gaps, through networks of dedicated volunteers.
- Community care volunteers provide transportation support to/from medical appointments, check-in calls, light housekeeping assistance and healthy meals.
- Here in our region, Community Care Northumberland leads this important work, and also supports hospice and palliative care in the home.
- Without this support, many individuals would not be able to safely remain in their home.
- Recognizing the future needs of our aging population, NHH has been a strong supporter of CCN's successful efforts to secure a 6-bed residential hospice.
- Continued investments and coordination with CCN's services are key to future health system capacity planning in our region.

It's our responsibility to exercise our right to vote and to make an informed decision on the choices before us. During this election campaign, consider asking the candidates in the new Northumberland Peterborough-South riding for their party's views on the issues above, and the other health care topics important to your family, today and in the future.

**Elizabeth Selby, Chair, NHH Board of Directors
and Linda Davis, NHH President and CEO**