



## **NEWS RELEASE – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

### **Virtual Visiting Program Expanding at Northumberland Hills Hospital**

**NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY, Wednesday, May 27, 2020** – With COVID-19 restrictions in place, many have had to find creative ways to connect with each other, and to mark important birthdays, anniversaries, new births, and other significant milestones. This is true not only across the community, but within the inpatient units at Northumberland Hills Hospital (NHH), where a Virtual Visiting program has been successfully trialed with over 50 participants and, this week, expanded to help patients and their families connect with their loved ones while adhering to the necessary visitor restrictions that remain in place at hospitals throughout Ontario.

NHH's Virtual Visiting program uses iPads and the Microsoft Teams platform to support non-clinical, social video calls between patients and their family and friends. Thanks to the generosity of local donors, what started as an ad hoc effort is now able to expand with the donation of additional, dedicated iPads to allow for more of these virtual visits to take place.

Recognizing the hospital may have some extraordinary funding needs at this time, the Grafton & Community Sports and Events Committee, which raises money throughout the year for a variety of community sporting and social event programs, reached out to NHH to offer their support of this initiative. A representative of that Committee, David Harnden, also serves as a volunteer with NHH's Patient and Family Advisory Council and was involved in providing input to the hospital on the implementation of visitor restrictions—input that included the exploration of virtual options to support patient/caregiver connections. In addition, one local couple, who wish to remain anonymous, stepped forward to offer their support. Collectively, their contributions will fund the purchase of eight new iPads to enable the expansion of the Virtual Visiting program across all inpatient units.

"We are grateful to have the community's support to expand the Virtual Visiting program," says Amy Ludolph, Recreational Therapist and project-lead on NHH's Virtual Visiting program. "It has been a team effort across many departments, that the hospital has supported from the beginning. We feel so fortunate to have the ability to connect our patients with their loved ones despite these challenging times. For myself, I feel so privileged for these families to let me into these intimate moments, and significant

milestones that are so cherished. The happy tears and smiling faces of our patients and their families are worth more than any words can describe.”

“My mother is in palliative care,” shares Richard Gibbs, whose family was among those approached to participate in the test phase. “The prospect of not seeing her through the toughest part of her life, (due to the pandemic) was heartbreaking. Northumberland [Hills] Hospital staff took the time and care to organize video conferencing. It was a ray of light in a dark time that brought humanity back to an inhumane situation. My love and thanks go out to Amy, Tara and all the staff who spearheaded this initiative. The care and compassion you have shown is an inspiration to us all. You put the care in care worker. I can’t thank you enough.”

Visitor restrictions have been in place at NHH since March 17, 2020 to minimize the risk of spreading COVID-19, particularly to vulnerable populations. Since this time, more than 50 Virtual Visits have taken place as part of the pilot program to celebrate milestone moments, introduce new babies to family members, connect loved ones from across the globe, or simply to catch up and maintain the connections and support that are vital to the patient journey. One such moment was a 90<sup>th</sup> virtual birthday celebration.

“It was a milestone in my mother's life,” shares Liz Porter, another early family participant in this program. “She turned 90 years young, but unfortunately, due to the pandemic we couldn't be with her in person, but [NHH] made it possible for all of us to be together through virtual visit. I believe seeing everyone on screen made for a great birthday under these difficult circumstances.”

Virtual visiting appointments, currently available Monday through Friday, can be requested by either patients or by their family members or friends. Phone appointments are also available on request. Those interested in requesting a Virtual Visiting appointment with an individual admitted to NHH can contact the hospital's Virtual Visiting Team at 905-372-6811 ext. 3146 or send an email to [virtualconnections@nhh.ca](mailto:virtualconnections@nhh.ca) and include their preferred contact information, as well as the unit, room number and initials of the patient they would like to connect with (note: to protect patient privacy, the patient's full name should not be included in the email).

Two staff members—Amy Ludolph, Recreational Therapist, and Tara McKerroll, Registered Practical Nurse—are currently coordinating all visits. The NHH IT department, instrumental in its pilot phase, will continue to support the Virtual Visiting team as required. All efforts will be made to accommodate patient and family requests and feedback will continue to be monitored.

It is not currently known when visitor or volunteer restrictions might be lifted at Ontario hospitals. It is anticipated that NHH's Virtual Visiting option will continue to be available beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, potentially as part of the NHH Auxiliary volunteer programming that existed prior to the pandemic.

For more information about Virtual Visiting, including answers to frequently asked questions, please visit: [nhh.ca/patients/virtual-visiting](http://nhh.ca/patients/virtual-visiting)

For more information on how you can make a gift to support NHH through the NHH Foundation, please visit: [www.nhhfoundation.ca](http://www.nhhfoundation.ca).

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**About Northumberland Hills Hospital** – Located approximately 100 kilometres east of Toronto, NHH delivers a broad range of acute, post-acute, outpatient and diagnostic services. Acute services include emergency and intensive care, medical/surgical care, obstetrical care and palliative care. Post-acute specialty services (PASS) include restorative care and rehabilitation. Mental health care, chemotherapy, dialysis and 16 other ambulatory care clinics are offered on an outpatient basis through partnerships with regional centres and nearby specialists. NHH offers a full range of diagnostic services, including magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), computed tomography (CT) and mammography. The hospital serves the catchment area of west Northumberland County. A mixed urban and rural population of approximately 60,000 residents, west Northumberland comprises the Town of Cobourg, the Municipality of Port Hope and the townships of Hamilton, Cramahe and Alnwick/Haldimand. NHH employs approximately 600 people and relies on the additional support provided by physicians and volunteers. NHH is an active member of the Central East Local Health Integration Network. For more information, please visit [www.nhh.ca](http://www.nhh.ca) or follow us on Twitter [@NorHillsHosp](https://twitter.com/NorHillsHosp).

**About the Northumberland Hills Hospital Foundation** – The mission of the Northumberland Hills Hospital Foundation is to inspire generous giving to enable exceptional patient care at Northumberland Hills Hospital. With a dedicated team of enthusiastic volunteers and staff, the NHH Foundation is passionately committed to improving health care and the quality of life for people living in west Northumberland. Since 2002, the NHH Foundation has raised over \$57 million to build and equip Northumberland Hills Hospital. This support comes from generous community support through a variety of programs including major gifts, planned giving, signature and third party events, direct mail and commemorative giving. For more information, visit: [www.nhhfoundation.ca](http://www.nhhfoundation.ca) or like us on Facebook.

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