

Ross Memorial ER seeing far fewer patients during COVID-19 pandemic

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Pre-planning and a cooperative community have helped hospitals like Lindsay's Ross Memorial Hospital avoid overwhelming their resources during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In a recent report, the Financial Accountability Office credited the provincial government for helping to reduce hospital demand by taking early action to slow and limit the spread of the virus and delay and lower the peak number of infections.

In fact, the FAO projects that had the province waited until March 22 instead of March 17 to announce state of emergency measures, the number of COVID-19 patients in critical care could have been four times greater.

Along with additional funding from the province for new acute and critical-care beds, hospitals cancelled elective surgeries and other non-urgent clinical activity and relocated patients to alternative settings.

According to vice-president of patient care and chief nursing officer Anne Overhoff, the hospital has seen a dramatic decline in visits and admissions, as compared to previous years around the same time.

“We’ve created capacity to prepare for a potential surge in patients by reducing non-essential services and procedures. The public health measures in place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 are also preventing spread of other seasonal illnesses, so overall, there are less hospital visits and admissions.”

The hospital is also experiencing significantly lower numbers in the emergency department. A normal day could see as many as 130 people visit the ER for care. During the pandemic, those numbers are closer to 45 per day.

“However, when patients arrive, they are often sicker and really in need of that emergency care,” said Overhoff, who cautions the public against waiting until the “last minute” or second-guessing the urgency of their emergency.

“It’s important for the community to know that our team is here for them, and there are several measures in place throughout our hospital, including the ER, to keep you safe.”

Overhoff notes that this will continue once the pandemic lifts.

“We will continue to work with our regional and provincial partners throughout the pandemic, including on plans to slowly resume services with enhanced screening measures remaining in place,” stated Overhoff, who credits the “resilience and passion of our team” for providing the greatest lesson learned. “They have really banded together at all stages of this pandemic, responding to the ever-changing local

situation. We are also so pleased to be working with our partners on a coordinated response to support our community. I'm sure we'll come out of this with a renewed sense of how strong we can be when we work together.”