

Outbreak at Bobcaygeon nursing home expected to get worse before it gets better

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The rising number of deaths at Pinecrest Nursing Home in Bobcaygeon has hit residents hard, but medical director Dr. Michelle Snarr cautions the situation is expected to get worse before it gets better.

In a way, Snarr says the Bobcaygeon long-term care home is a victim of its own success; a friendly, homey environment, where the staff work hard to keep the residents engaged, active and social. When word of the first COVID-19 confirmed case [was made March 20](#), Snarr knew it was “going to be bad.”

Just a few days after the first three deaths at the facility, Snarr sent a notice to the families of the residents in the facility. Efforts to contain the virus, including closing the residence to visitors, ramped up along with collaboration with the local health unit.

Sadly, the number of deaths at the facility, as of March 31, has climbed to 12, dozens more are ill and roughly half of the staff has been tested – the majority positively – for COVID-19.

Dealing with the virus – and all the attention it is drawing as the largest outbreak in the province – is taking its toll on everyone, including Snarr. She isn’t sleeping well, has constant nausea – sometimes with stomach pain – and her receptionist struggles with ongoing headaches.

“All of us in the office look and feel haggard and exhausted. Tears at times,” said Snarr. “Staff at Pinecrest describe it as a ‘war zone’ and I believe this is accurate and not an exaggeration. I certainly feel like I am a field commander in a war.”

There have been campaigns and requests for staffing and local health care, including Kawartha Lakes paramedics, have stepped up to help fill in gaps.

Snarr added the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) is working on a plan to have students or retired staff help.

For a while, it almost appeared to be an exercise in futility.

“The situation was dire. The few staff who were well enough to work have been working harder than an outsider could possibly imagine,” said Snarr who deeply appreciates the response. “Fortunately, staffing has improved as ill staff return to work, and as willing and able people have stepped up. A PSW who didn't work at Pinecrest came forth and is helping. Two husbands of staff came forward to do janitorial work.”

But Snarr cautions this does not mean Pinecrest is out of the woods yet, never mind turning the corner.

Despite the negatives, Snarr points out there are lessons to be learned that might give hospitals and long-term care home a fighting chance when it comes to preparing the onslaught.

“Yesterday I attended a virtual meeting with others in our LHIN who were sharing ideas on getting their hospitals ready for the onslaught, which is predicted in one to two weeks. We are hoping to spare ourselves from going the way of Italy or Spain,” said Snarr. “The problem is the speed at which this monstrous thing (COVID) is moving.”