

Pandemic creates learning lessons for health care in Kawartha Lakes

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Healthcare groups have started to get a handle on the COVID-19 pandemic, but leaders are very aware how easy it can be to lose that grip.

The local health unit is ramping up essential health programs such as food safety courses, water quality testing, Lyme disease prevention and vaccinations, but remaining ever vigilant of changes to pandemic data.

It's one of the reasons why maintaining messaging to the public remains a key goal for the Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit.

“We need everyone to assume other people have the infection and conduct themselves accordingly,” stated medical officer of health Dr. Lynn Noseworthy.

She added, if a second wave of coronavirus hits in the fall as predicted, it will exacerbate the 70 to 80 outbreaks that normally occur at places like long-term care facilities and compound traditional influenza cases.

It's why the health unit, as well as other groups like Community Care City of Kawartha Lakes and Ross Memorial Hospital, continues to make staff physical and mental health a priority.

“Exhaustion and burnout is a concern,” said Community Care CEO Barb Mildon.

Recently, the agency's board treated 140 staff, volunteers and management to a free meal as a way of saying ‘thank you’ for their efforts. Staff are also being encouraged to take advantage of employee assistance programs and mental health resources are widely promoted.

Ensuring a resilient staff is challenging enough when services run 24-7, never mind during a pandemic. With cottage season starting to ramp up, the Ross Memorial is working to ensure staff take time off now to recharge, said president and CEO Kelly Isfan.

Extra diligence is also being paid, added Isfan, as the hospital moves to ramp up services — elective surgeries have increased to 50 per cent capacity — and emergency department visits increase.

“We're seeing our ER volumes creeping back up ... which is good,” said Isfan, explaining too many people were showing up with serious health issues that should have been treated sooner.

The pandemic has also underscored important partnerships.

Kawartha Lakes Paramedic Services has conducted about 100 in-home tests for those

unable to access the hospital's assessment centre, and is working with the hospital as part of a mobile assessment team.

“There's lots of interesting ways of working with community partners and assisting whatever way we can,” said deputy chief Sara Johnston, adding paramedics are also working with housing and homelessness groups.