

Hamilton started driving for Community Care City of Kawartha Lakes close to three years ago on the suggestion of fellow volunteer driver, Budd Keenan. He “thought about it” for a month, applied and was accepted.

“I find it a very gratifying job. I get a lot of enjoyment out of it,” said Hamilton who helps transport clients to important medical appointments such as cancer treatments and dialysis.

Prior to the pandemic, Hamilton was one of close to two dozen such drivers. That number dropped to about five in March, a combination of the fact many drivers are in the high-risk age group and the agency’s decision to mitigate risk by suspending a wide range of services. Some drivers moved to other jobs, such as delivering Meals on Wheels that saw use spike close to 40 per cent due to seniors isolating. Normally, Hamilton worked two to three days a week, but for the last several months, it’s been more like five or six days.

Hamilton said the agency has gone “above and beyond” to ensure volunteers’ safety including distributed personal protective equipment and even installing a plastic curtain between him and the passengers. He gets tested every two weeks, but that’s so he can still visit his mother at Victoria Manor.

“Regardless of what’s going on . . . I never considered stopping, but there were still concerns . . . And if I had to pick someone up at a nursing home, it was like getting into Fort Knox; they’re very particular,” said Hamilton noting he views his efforts as “a really small sacrifice.”

“If they don’t get to their cancer treatments or dialysis, they’re going to die.”

While he hasn’t had any of his passengers pass away due to COVID-19 – one did test positive and he had to self-monitor - Hamilton said it’s “tough” regardless the reason.

“When you’re taking someone to Toronto, for example, that’s two hours each way. A lot of the time you’re talking to people to pass the time and, after a few trips, you really get to know them. So it’s hard when someone passes away. They’re not just another passenger,” explained Hamilton.