



NEWS

# 'Concerning' rise of COVID-19 puts Kawartha hospitals in key support role

## Hospitals have been told to be ready for patients

By Catherine Whitnall, Taylor Clysdale Kawartha Lakes This Week  
Monday, January 18, 2021

The rise in COVID-19 cases in Ontario is becoming worrisome to hospitals, as modelling predicts increases could overwhelm intensive care units by Valentine's Day.

Hospitals in Kawartha Lakes and Peterborough are already planning around the provincial surge and dealing with patients from other areas.

“We are very concerned about the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases, both for the health of our community and how it may impact our hospital’s capacity,” said Ross Memorial Hospital president and CEO Kelly Isfan.

During the first wave of the pandemic, Ross Memorial saw five hospitalizations over several months. There has been a significant increase in COVID-19 positive in-patients during the second wave, and in a much shorter amount of time, said Isfan.

Between Dec. 28 and Jan. 12, seven patients were admitted to the hospital.

Meanwhile, patients from other regions hit harder by COVID-19 are already being transferred to Peterborough Regional Health Centre (PRHC), with more expected to come.

“As an organization we are ready to do what we need to support them,” said Dr. Lynn Mikula, vice-president, chief of staff and chief medical executive for the hospital.

All hospitals have been asked to prepare to take on patients from hospitals harder hit by COVID-19, which is one of the key reasons the public is urged to abide by all government and public health measures to slow the spread of the virus and maintain hospital capacity for those who need acute care.

Ross Memorial currently has nine intensive care unit beds and uses an established surge plan that is typically relied upon each year during flu season, which includes the opening of additional bed space and increasing staffing.

“At this time, we have opened and staffed an additional 12 beds, and are prepared to open an additional 16 beds if needed. We also work together with our regional hospital partners and the province on both capacity and resources,” explained Isfan, pointing out the hospital recently received funding for an additional ICU bed, “which remains open at this time.”

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In Peterborough, there are 28 ICU beds with potential to add 24 more. That could be by converting “non-traditional” spaces in the hospital like dining areas to ICU area, said Mikula.

There’s also a plan, if there is an “extreme surge,” to convert the Evinrude Centre into a secondary hospital site to deal with less critically-ill patients, she adds.

Plans are in place so that could happen, “at a moment’s notice.”

Throughout the pandemic, ICU capacity at PRHC has been “at or below” normal historical averages. There have been 19 COVID-19 hospitalizations in Peterborough. A benefit has been the fact influenza numbers are virtually zero locally, reducing the typical seasonal surge.

When it comes to equipment resources, Ross Memorial currently has eight ventilators and one transport ventilator. Should a surge occur the hospital would consult regional partners and the province for additional ventilators.

The plan is the same for PRHC, which has 31 ventilators on hand.

Moving forward, the two hospitals continue to work with regional and provincial health-care partners regarding accepting patient transfers from other areas where the system is experiencing critically high patient volumes.

“Patients transferred here may or may not be positive for COVID-19. At this time, we have not been asked to receive any patient transfers related to COVID-19, though we, along with any other Ontario hospital with capacity, may be called upon at any time to do so,” said Isfan.

When it comes to the province’s current situation with the virus, Mikula said the “projections generate a lot of unease,” and encourages residents to follow provincial guidelines, stay home, and avoid any unnecessary travel.

With that said, she also says the hospital is safe and people in need of hospital-level care should continue coming to the hospital.

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