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Comms centre issues continue

Continued from page 1

Essentially, when you call for an ambulance the phone gets answered by a Ministry of Health staff, they process the address, they screen the call. As soon as they dispatch the ambulance and give it to us, at that point in time is when the region is responsible for service levels, said Greg Sage, Chief of Paramedic Services for Halton Region.

When we look at overall response to patients, we look at the whole experience from the time they call to when the paramedics arrive on scene. But we're actually only legally accountable for the period of once they give us the call to when we get there.

This governance model is not typically what you would see in other jurisdictions outside of Ontario, added Sage.

The region has been releasing annual reports on the call centre issues for years. In 2016, MOHLTC staff implemented an enhanced process for reviewing and addressing performance issues identified by the region's paramedic services staff.

The majority of concerns reported, according to the region's report, stem from call delays caused by the closest ambulance not being sent to calls and/or failure to comply with MOHLTC CACC policies.

Halton staff have identified several com-

mon themes in the delays, including outdated technology in CACC, which relies on manual processes, a lack of direct management oversight, a lack of proper education and training for new call centre staff and failure on the part of CACC staff to comply with policies and procedures already in place.

The ability of the region to provide a high-functioning paramedic service, as well as to meet council-approved response time targets is greatly influenced by the performance of the local CACC, said the region in its report.

Errors as the CACC can result in a response time that needlessly exceeds Halton's approved response time targets and could potentially impact a patient in a negative manner, added the report.

The region has seen a large increase in call volume in recent years and invested significantly in its Paramedic Services Division to maintain response times.

In a separate Halton Region report, staff said these investments ensured all council-approved response targets were met in 2016, adding call volume increased by 8.1 per cent compared to the previous year, while the number of patients transported to hospital increased by 6.6 per cent.

Continued on page 11

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