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Laurier Brantford profs present research-based play on influenza pandemics

BRANTFORD – Two Laurier Brantford professors will present their original play, *Abide With Me: A Story of Two Pandemics*, July 23 and 24 in the chapel of the Brantford General Hospital.

Health studies professors Kate Rossiter and Rebecca Godderis wrote the work-in-progress play to highlight the ethical dilemmas that may occur during a pandemic. Funny, insightful and engaging, *Abide With Me* urges its audience to ask hard questions about the role of ethics in pandemic planning and response.

“Both SARS and H1N1 illuminated some of the tough decisions health-care providers have to make during infectious disease outbreaks,” says Rossiter. “We want our audience to contemplate these issues outside the chaos and confusion caused by pandemics, and theatre provides an important way for research like this to reach the wider community.”

Abide With Me tells the story of one family over the course two pandemics. The play begins as grandma Helen Hargrove awakens to find herself in a modern hospital after a bad fall. As Helen learns that she is in the hospital during the onset of a new pandemic, she revisits her childhood memories of growing up in Brantford during the Spanish Flu outbreak of 1918.

“Brantford’s experience of the 1918 flu gave us a great deal of insight into what happens to a community during a severe pandemic,” says Godderis, the project’s historian.

The two playwrights were funded and supported by the Canadian Program of Research on Ethics in a Pandemic, located at the University of Toronto’s Joint Centre for Bioethics. Historical material for the play was gathered from a variety of local sources including the Brant Museum and Archives, the Brantford General Hospital and Nursing School Archives, and local newspapers.

Supported by local theatre group Brant Theatre Workshops, and with an ensemble cast that features both community members and Laurier Brantford students, this research-based play runs about 45 minutes long, and will be followed by a feedback session facilitated by the play’s creators.

There are two evening shows, July 23 and 24, at 7:30 p.m., and one matinee show, July 24, at 2 p.m. Admission is by donation at the door. Proceeds support the music therapy program at Brantford General Hospital.