

COVID-19 claims 3 more local lives, outbreaks declared at Shelburne retirement/care homes

Written By MIKE BAKER

Three elderly residents living in Shelburne retirement homes have died this week as the community comes to grips with two further outbreaks of COVID-19 in the area.

After an outbreak of the highly contagious virus was declared at Headwaters Health Care Centre in Orangeville on March 31, two retirement homes in Shelburne – Dufferin Oaks long-term care home and Shelburne Residence Retirement and Nursing Home have this week announced outbreaks of their own.

On Monday, it was revealed that two residents of Shelburne Residence had died after contracting COVID-19. This followed news that a Dufferin Oaks resident had passed away sometime over the Easter long weekend.

While the County, as stewards of Dufferin Oaks, has yet to make a statement regarding the death, statistics updated on their website daily state that there have been three residents, including the deceased, and five staff members test positive for COVID-19 in recent weeks. In total, 58 residents have been tested at the home, with 18 coming back negative and 37 currently under investigation. Statistics pertaining to confirmed cases at Shelburne Residence were not available as of press time.

This brings the death total in Dufferin County to four. It was revealed last week that a 64-year-old Orangeville man, now identified as John Braaksma, was the first casualty in the area, passing away on April 7. John was a popular figure in the community, working at Hallmark Toyota for more than a decade, where he was known as the operator of the dealership's community shuttle service.

Confirmed cases of COVID-19 have, once again, seen a significant increase over the past week. Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health is reporting 162 individuals within its service area have contracted COVID-19, with 55 of those cases occurring in Dufferin County. As of press time, 37 of those cases have been resolved. A further 43 cases have been confirmed in Caledon, as reported by Peel Public Health.

There have been four new confirmed cases of COVID-19 at Headwaters hospital since last week. Two patients and two staff members tested positive for the virus since April 9, bringing the overall total of those infected at the hospital to 28 – 12 patients and 16 staff members. The COVID-19 Assessment Centre, located outside the hospital, has now been visited 2,448 times as of Wednesday. Tests have been carried out on 1,136 individuals to date.

Looking at stats worldwide, according to the website Worldometer, there are a little over 2 million COVID-19 cases as of noon on Wednesday (April 15). In total, 129,960 people have died as a result of the virus, with 496,562 individuals making full recoveries. Canada is now ranked 12th in terms of total cases among individual nations, with 27,557 cases. As of press time, there have been 954 fatalities nationwide since March 9. Here in Ontario, 7,953 individuals have contracted COVID-19, with 2,574 making full recoveries and 274 individuals passing away.

Frontline workers at Headwaters hospital continue to work through the pandemic. Lori Ker, Chair of the Headwaters Health Care Centre Board of Directors reserves special thanks for the hundreds of local heroes who continue to put themselves in harm's way in the face of this global pandemic.

"These are unprecedented times. Seemingly overnight our world changed dramatically, not only in the dangers we face but in how kindness, compassion, empathy and professional dedication have risen to new heights," Ms. Ker said.

"Locally, we are 'One Community Caring Together, supporting each other and the hospital and supporting our care providers in any way we can,'" Ms. Ker continued. "There is wide recognition that everyone on the Headwaters team is going above and beyond in

their everyday dedication to provide excellent care for the community.?

She added, "The Headwaters board recognizes the exemplary service of all of our staff and physicians during this pandemic and we are deeply grateful. We know that a strong hospital is a key pillar of a thriving community, and that Headwaters is strong because of the courage and collaboration of all staff and health care providers.

"Thank you for your outstanding service, taking on extra hours, extra shifts, extra responsibilities and extra precautions to maintain Headwaters as a shining example of exemplary care despite the increased risk that you all must endure. Each of you is an inspiration to our community for your dedication and selfless teamwork," Ms. Ker said.

While much of Ontario remains on an unofficial lockdown, with only essential services open for business and residents encouraged to stay home as much as possible, there has been indications south of the border that U.S. President Donald Trump is itching to instill a sense of normalcy in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was reported last month that President Trump hoped the country would "return to normal" in time for Easter.

With the Easter weekend now having passed, and no such measures taken, many are wondering how much longer Trump will maintain the status quo. Here in Canada, there has been little indication, by either the federal or provincial government, that we are anywhere close to lifting emergency measures implemented last month. The federal government is offering financial aid to businesses and residents as far ahead as June, while the Ontario government passed a bill this week to extend the province's state of emergency until May 12.

"No doubt there is a long journey ahead before we emerge from this pandemic, and it will take all of us to care for each other," Ms. Ker said. "Everyone on the Headwaters team, from support workers to health care providers, community partners and administrators, is making a critically important contribution to the care of the community at this extraordinary time."

She concluded, "You, the staff, are truly the heroes in the face of this ruthless pandemic."