

Headwaters hospital joins regional strategic plan for cancer services

Written By **MIKE PICKFORD**

Headwaters Health Care Centre (HHCC) administrators are anticipating cancer services in Dufferin County will receive a huge shot in the arm after the Mississauga Halton Central West Regional Cancer Program released details of a new strategic plan designed to improve care across the region.

Local physicians were clued in on the new initiative during a 30-minute presentation at Headwaters on Tuesday (June 12). Four key priorities were outlined, with Leslie Starr-Hemburrow, Regional Vice President of Mississauga Halton Central West Regional Cancer Program, noting they would serve to guide cancer service delivery across the region.

Those priorities direct facilities to ensure they are providing support to the whole person, connecting and coordinating care, optimizing quality of care and experience and excelling in performance and sustainability.

“As we develop our strategy we asked stakeholders what matters to them and it was clear it matters that we provide exceptional, compassionate care for people impacted by cancer,” Ms. Starr-Hemburrow said.

Physicians and staff at HHCC welcomed the opportunity to work more closely with their community partners. The facility has provided oncology programs in the region for more than 15 years and Peter Varga, the hospital's VP of Patient Care, noted the introduction of a system-wide, coordinated approach to providing cancer services was an important milestone for HHCC.

“This is a real positive for everyone involved with Headwaters Health Care Centre,” Mr. Varga told the Free Press. “As a result of this partnership, this plan, we expect that our oncology program will see some significant growth, particularly in regards to surgical volumes. Breast cancer and gastrointestinal surgeries (will rise), while we'll also see growth in chemotherapy and endoscopy treatments.”

The timing of this new initiative is ideal, says Mr. Varga, with Headwaters recently unveiling its new ambulatory care services wing. That addition should see the hospital “basically double” its chemotherapy volumes, according to Mr. Varga.

“We do over 1,000 chemotherapy treatments per year, we do approximately 2,500 colonoscopies per year and we carry out about 60 breast cancer surgeries and 25 colorectal surgeries per year,” Mr. Varga said. “We anticipate, with some of the changes we're planning, to see growth in all of those areas.”

The local hospital has already supplemented its cancer-related services this year with the addition of the Ontario Breast Screening Program, announced in January. Mr. Varga noted the facility had been accepting patients under the program since February and expects to carry out 2,500 tests in its first year.

The facility has provided breast screening services for patients for a number of years, although Mr. Varga pointed out they were strictly for low-risk individuals. Now, with the support of the OBSP, Headwaters is able to offer supports to more high-risk cases in the region.

“When you are designated OBSP things change with regards to what you can do with breast screening. Now, high-risk women can walk into the hospital and self-refer for a screening, which we weren't able to accommodate before,” Mr. Varga said. “Now, women in our service area don't have to be referred by a family doctor. If they know they have breast cancer in the family, they can refer themselves.”

The addition of a new Diagnostic Assessment Program, designed to improve the diagnostic phase for all individuals undergoing a potential cancer diagnosis, main management clinic and palliative care services will help with Headwaters' mantra to bring care, specifically cancer care, closer to come.

?For me, the most important part of this regional plan is the message that, instead of everyone trying to go about things themselves, trying to serve their community in their own silo, we're spreading the message that everyone needs to work together to gain the benefits of regional cooperation,? Mr. Varga said. ?It wasn't always the case that a smaller hospital like ours could grow simply because we wanted to. With the new leadership in place here at the facility and new leadership in place at the regional cancer program, we look at each other to see what we can do together to serve our community.?

For more information on Headwaters Health Care Centre and the services it offers, visit www.headwatershealth.ca.