

Patient, seven staff at Headwaters hospital contract COVID-19

Written By MIKE BAKER

There has been a confirmed outbreak of COVID-19 at Headwaters Health Care Centre.

The local hospital, in conjuncture with Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH), issued a release to media on Tuesday evening (March 31) confirming that one patient at the hospital, as well as five members of staff, have tested positive for COVID-19 in the past 72 hours.

Details were scarce as of press time, but health-care officials confirmed that patient was immediately isolated upon arrival at the hospital last Thursday (March 26) and cared for by a team wearing full personal protective equipment.

The patient's case, officials say, is unrelated to the five staff cases. All staff, as well as those who came into contact with them, are currently at home self-isolating for the next 14 days.

"We are currently aware of five healthcare workers on one unit who have tested positive for COVID-19, and as the virus continues to spread we expect there will be more," said Kim Delahunt, President and CEO of Headwaters. "We quickly made sure those who tested positive went home so that they can recover fully. Other staff who were in contact with those individuals were sent home, or advised not to come back and self-isolate as well."

In an update on Wednesday afternoon (April 1), Ms. Delahunt confirmed an additional two cases have been identified amongst staff, bringing the total number of those infected to seven. All staff members have been working on the hospital's F-Wing, which is a medical/cardiac unit. As of Wednesday, 32 staff members are at home self-isolating and self-monitoring, having been in contact or close proximity to those infected.

The seven individuals diagnosed with COVID-19 included nurses, personal support workers and ward clerks.

When asked how the hospital would cope with the loss of 32 workers, Ms. Delahunt expressed her belief that the existing staff would pull together to cover any gaps in service, while maintaining hope that the majority of those currently self-isolating would soon be back at work.

"Those staff that are self-isolating that are deemed critical and do not have symptoms may be called back to work. They will be required to check their temperature twice a shift, don personal protective equipment and monitor for any symptoms," Ms. Delahunt said. "We are also looking at all staff across the organization and casual staff to help fill in any gaps. We may be proceeding with some additional recruitment as well."

She added, "The organization has been planning for staffing challenges as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic for some time. This has put a strain on resources. The process is complicated as every staff member who could have possibly been exposed needs to be contacted and deemed high, medium or low-risk based on a specific set of criteria. Of course, no one should come to work if they are feeling unwell. Any staff members experiencing symptoms must immediately stop work and notify Occupational Health."

As cases of COVID-19 continue to rise across Ontario ? up to 2,392 as of press time, with at least 40 of those within our public health region, WDGPH is continuing to monitor the local outbreak.

"I am very confident that the leadership and staff at Headwaters Health Care Centre are taking all necessary measures," said Dr. Nicola Mercer, Medical Officer of Health and CEO of WDGPH. "Please avoid going to the hospital unless you feel it is a medical emergency. If you have mild symptoms, stay home and get well. If you feel you need to speak with your physician you can call to arrange a telephone consultation, or call Telehealth Ontario."

She concluded, "COVID-19 can be anywhere in the community. Maintain physical distancing of six feet with anyone but immediate family members and wash your hands frequently."

In total, more than 57,000 people across Ontario have been tested for COVID-19, with 689 resolved cases and 37 deaths as of press time. According to provincial health officials, 11.3 percent of all COVID-19 patients have been hospitalized at one point, with 3.8 percent receiving treatment in an intensive care unit (ICU). The median age of all 2,392 patients is 50.

There are, currently, no specific treatments for COVID-19, and no vaccine to protect against it. Symptoms of the virus can include a fever, cough and shortness of breath. Health officials are advising those experiencing symptoms to contact their doctor, or Telehealth Ontario prior to visiting a hospital or local assessment centre.

As of March 31, total visits to the assessment centre at Headwaters hospital had reached 1,649. From those visits, 1,529 individuals were assessed, with 564 tested for COVID-19.