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Dufferin EMS recognizing Paramedic Services Week May 23-29

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There's never been a greater time to thank a paramedic.

May 23-29 is Paramedic Services Week and a great time to recognize the heroes in our community who are the first to respond in the event of a medical emergency.

?Over the last year, paramedics have been at the forefront of the fight against COVID?19. Day and night, these hardworking health care professionals put their mental and physical health on the line. Despite the risks they face, paramedics continue to show up for Canadians, and serve their communities, with the utmost care, compassion, and professionalism,? said Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, in a statement on May 23.

?Thank you for risking your safety, sacrificing time with your loved ones, and going above and beyond every day to help keep us safe and healthy. All Canadians are grateful for your incredible dedication and service.?

The way that paramedic services are delivered has evolved rapidly over the last year since COVID-19 began transmitting locally, but Dufferin County EMS Chief Tom Reid said his team has truly stepped up to the challenge, facing it head on.

?The guys and girls here have been true professionals, to be honest, when it comes to the response to COVID,? said Reid. ?People are starting to feel more comfortable with COVID now, certainly, but I can say at the beginning when no one wanted to go and do anything, everyone was afraid to step their nose outside the door, these folks were looking after people that had symptoms on a day-to-day basis.

?The heroic efforts that they have done for the last year and a half ? I feel extremely proud of the group and the team here, because they certainly have rose to the occasion,? he added.

Some of the greatest challenges associated with the pandemic, especially when it was first taking hold in the community, was the rapidly changing information on COVID-19 and many unknowns, said Reid.

He noted that on the bright side, the community's response to the pandemic has been fantastic.

?The silver lining was the goodness of people,? said Reid. ?When we were short on PPE, they were the first people that came and donated to the health care providers. They also did whatever they could do to support the team, like we had folks sewing masks ? they have done whatever was needed, or whatever they could to assist.

?I just can't say how proud I am about our community, because as a whole, the folks? have done their very best to make a bad situation as best it can be, so I do want to tip our hat to the community as a whole.?

Education in the community

The theme for this year's Paramedic Services Week is ?Paramedic as Educator ? Citizen Ready? and demonstrates the important role that paramedics have in educating the public.

One of the key education programs Dufferin EMS runs is its CPR training, which has been put on hold because of COVID-19 but will resume once the pandemic comes under control.

A program that's continued to run during the pandemic is public access defibrillator training, which shows residents how to use one

of the 150 public access defibrillators' set up throughout Dufferin County.

?We continue to go around and orientate and teach on how to use it, the importance of it, where is it, when to use it, all of those types of things,? said Reid.

In addition to the training, residents can also rent a defibrillator free of charge if they're awaiting a heart surgery or fear they may experience cardiac complications and require one. The program is also great if someone's throwing an event (post COVID) where there will be lots of people.

Handing out and educating the public on NARCAN (naloxone), which can revive a person who's having an opioid overdose, is another large part of the education Dufferin County paramedics provide.

The importance of knowing how to administer NARCAN has never been more important as a new report shows Ontario's opioid overdose deaths are up 75 per cent since the start of the pandemic, with 2,050 lives lost since last March.

Last week staff at Choices Youth Shelter received a training lesson from Dufferin EMS on knowing the signs of opioid overdose and how to best respond, using NARCAN.

Reid said he recommends carrying a NARCAN kit if you take illicit drugs, know someone who takes illicit drugs, or will be somewhere that illicit drugs are taken.

He also stressed the importance of calling 9-1-1 after giving NARCAN as the person who was just brought back from their overdose still requires medical treatment.

How to prepare for the ambulance

Public education on how to best prepare for the ambulance after dialing 9-1-1 has been at the forefront for Paramedic Services Week.

The first thing is be aware of your surroundings and know where you are, said Reid.

?Get the best identifiers to make sure that we can locate you quickly,? he noted.

Clearing the driveway of cars so there's a clear access for the ambulance is important as well.

If someone who's with the person requiring medical attention can exit the house and wave down the ambulances from the street, that is helpful as well, said Reid.

Clearing an area for the paramedics to enter the home and lay out a stretcher to transport the person in need is also recommended.

Another helpful tip is having a list of medications, medical records, and the Health Card of the person experiencing the emergency for paramedics when they arrive.

If the person requesting an ambulance has pets, in particular dogs, it is best to tuck them away while the paramedics respond.

?That's quite a risk that a lot of people don't think about you know, particularly if their owner or master's been hurt or is sick. Pets don't really understand that and sometimes when emergency responders come, you get the lights and the excitement and everything, that puts a quite the risk to our staff,? said Reid.

He added that putting your pet in a locked bedroom or kennel while they're responding to the call is likely the easiest option.