

HURON PERTH HEALTHCARE ALLIANCE

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Holiday Health Care Options

Avoiding non-emergency hospital visits during the holidays

At the Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance (HPHA) the four hospital sites are not immune to the hustle and bustle of the holiday season, most notably in the Emergency Departments.

With some health care providers closing offices or reducing hours over the holidays, emergency departments like those at the Clinton Public Hospital, St. Marys Memorial Hospital, Seaforth Community Hospital and Stratford General Hospital can be the only option for individuals seeking medical attention between Christmas and the New Year. This can lead to longer than usual wait times for healthier patients or for those who don't require immediate emergency care.

"This time of year is definitely challenging in terms of patient flow," says Anne Campbell, Vice President Partnerships & Chief Nursing Executive. "Under guidance from the South West Local Health Integration Network we've put together a plan that will help us deal with higher volumes of patients, both those who are admitted into hospital and those who visit our Emergency Departments."

Dr. Kyle Armstrong, a family physician with the Clinton Family Health Team who provides coverage in the Clinton Public Hospital Emergency Room, advises that by being prepared, an emergency visit may be avoided completely or result in an improved experience if emergency care is needed over the holidays.

"Making sure that everyone in your family has enough medications (both prescription and non-prescription) to get through the holidays and making sure all medical equipment such as inhalers, respirators, glucometers and diabetic supplies are in good working order is helpful. Knowing your family doctor's office hours and any back-up coverage it offers and knowing holiday hours of your local pharmacy can also help avoid a trip to the emergency department," notes Dr. Armstrong.

Individuals should also note what degree of services are available from other agencies that they are associated with such as the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Alzheimer's Society or the Southwest LHIN Home & Community Care.

"This time of year can be overwhelming and a source of stress for many as we try and keep up with the demands and pressures of the season. It can also be a time when seasonal depression and feelings of sadness or loneliness are increased. Those who are distressed, frightened or unable to cope can reach out to our Huron Perth Helpline and Crisis Response Team via our Crisis Line, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at **1-888-829-7484**," adds Campbell.

Another resource available 24/7 is Telehealth Ontario. Those looking for health advice or information can call **1-866-797-0000** and speak to a Registered Nurse. Telehealth nurses will not diagnose an illness or give medicine. Callers will be directed to the most appropriate level of care or be put in contact with a health professional who can advise on next steps. This service is free and confidential.

Of course not all emergency visits will be avoidable and symptoms including pains or tightness in the chest, broken bones, wounds that may need stitches and shortness of breath are all reasons to go to the Emergency Department.

“Our Doctors and Nurses are here if anyone needs us,” emphasizes Dr. Armstrong.

Patients visiting the Emergency Department are asked to remember to bring their OHIP card or other medical insurance information along with a list or supply of current medications. Those bringing children are asked to bring diapers, blankets and other comfort items. If your condition worsens while waiting in the department please notify a staff member immediately.

As with every emergency visit, no matter what time of year, patients will be seen by a doctor based on the severity of their illness or injury.

“We ask those visiting our Emergency Departments over the holidays to be patient,” concludes Dr. Armstrong. “We know that this is the last place many people want to be. As always we will see our sickest patients first. We are committed to providing timely, safe quality care to all our patients and their families.”



Photo cutline: Dr. Kyle Armstrong shares tips on how to avoid a trip to the Emergency Department over the busy holidays. “Your Holiday Health Checklist” is a resource available in the HPHA Emergency Departments and at www.hpha.ca

Additional Information

- Your Holiday Health Checklist (Attached)

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