

HURON PERTH HEALTHCARE ALLIANCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
February 27, 2020



Update on Reduced Hours at Clinton Public Hospital Emergency Department

The Huron Perth Healthcare Alliance (HPHA) is continuing to actively recruit experienced and qualified Registered Nurses (RN) to provide 24-hour Emergency Department (ED) coverage at the Clinton Public Hospital site.

In order to safely operate the ED, reduced hours of operation have been in effect since December 2, 2019 and will be continuing until the required number of RNs are able to be recruited. The hours of operation are 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week.

“At this time, one full-time and three part-time RN vacancies remain in the Clinton Public Hospital ED. While we have had some success in hiring, we have also had staff move to other sites or areas,” says Anne Campbell, Vice President Partnerships & Chief Nursing Executive. “In order to return to 24-hour ED service in Clinton, RNs with experience are required that are confident in their skills and abilities to safely respond to patients’ needs during the overnight hours when there are limited staff in the building.”

The situation HPHA is facing is not unique. The Seaforth Community Hospital site of the HPHA experienced a similar situation between 2009 and 2011, reducing ED operating hours until nursing staffing stabilized. This department reopened to provide 24/7 ED service. The Chesley Hospital site of the South Bruce Grey Health Centre reduced their ED hours in September 2019 due to the same staffing challenges.

Recruitment and retention of RNs is very challenging in rural communities. Nurses are required to develop a high degree of competency in a number of clinical domains and specialties, and new graduates are often unprepared to work in a rural setting without significant orientation and mentorship.

“Historically a minimum of six months to one year is required for an RN with no ED experience to feel prepared to work the night shift alone,” adds Campbell.

Since reduced hours were implemented in December 2019, the Clinton ED continues to provide care to 90% to 95% of the volume of patients between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. that are typically seen in a 24-hour period. There have been no negative outcomes and the direct 9-1-1 phone line installed at the ED door for use after hours has only been used once.

Active recruitment and training will continue with the intent to resume 24-hour ED services as soon as staffing resources are stabilized. “The reduction in hours is an interim measure. We are working closely with the Ministry of Health to explore funding to support our recruitment and retention efforts,” explains Andrew Williams, President & CEO. “We are committed to keeping all four of our sites strong and viable. This is evidenced by the investment of \$180,000 to renovate the inpatient tub and shower room and \$486,000 in the new digital X-ray suite.”

The community is reminded that between the hours of 8 p.m. and 8 a.m. patients will be able to access emergency services at one of the other area hospitals that provide 24-hour ED coverage including the Seaforth Community Hospital site of the HPHA, Alexandra Marine & General Hospital in Goderich, South Huron Hospital in Exeter and Wingham & District Hospital in Wingham.

As always, anyone having a medical emergency should call 9-1-1.

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