

8,000 homes reached as health agencies briefed residents

By Tabitha Wells

About 8,000 households in the Central West region (including almost 500 in Caledon) became involved recently in the fourth annual Telephone Town Hall event.

It provided an opportunity to ask questions and find out additional information about health services in the area through the Headwaters Health Care Centre and four partners.

The event, which included health care professionals from Headwaters, William Osler, Central West Community Care Access Centre (CCAC), Central West Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) and Peel Region, gave 30,000 residents across the Central West area the opportunity to participate.

“As health care professionals, we don't always speak in a language that everybody understands because of all of the technical jargon,” explained Headwaters Health Care Centre President and CEO Liz Reugg. “This is why we want to make sure that everyone is aware of what we have to offer, and if don't, how we can ensure to get that care through our partnerships.”

The idea was developed by the agencies through a discussion on how they could reach out to a large portion of the population that would be both informative and interactive – helping to answer the residents' questions instead of just providing general information. Some 8,000 homes received calls – some at random, and some who had signed up to be a part of Telephone Town Hall. During the calls, each agency was allotted time to give a brief summary of services they want residents to be aware of.

“At the last Telephone Town Hall, one of the big things was that people wanted more information on services available to seniors, so that was mainly the focus of (this year's) calls,” said Reugg. “When we asked those who took part whether they would be likely to participate again and whether the event was helpful, over 90 per cent responded that it was.”

According to Reugg, part of the reason services for seniors was of such high interest is that there is a growing population of people in that age group.

“We are consistent in Dufferin with the rest of the province, and we're going to the point where we have the first wave of the baby boomers entering those stages,” she said. “In Dufferin, we are looking at our seniors' population doubling in the next 10 years.” When they polled those that participated in the calls, the majority of people were aged 40 and up, but the highest percentage was residents older than 60. While a lot of the questions had to do with seniors care, however, there was a large amount of questions dealing with medical situations people of any age might encounter.

“There were people who had questions about what to do when someone they care for is in the hospital, how to get in touch with the doctor, find out emergency wait times and so on,” Reugg commented. “It's a limited time frame to answer all the questions, so we have also committed to answer the other questions people might have via an online submission.”

One big point that Reugg said they tried to get across when discussing services in Dufferin and Caledon was to remind people that Headwaters cannot be all things to all people, but that they can help connect people with those services.

“We can't provide every service, but what is important to us is that we develop those partnerships so that we can get access for the people living in this community when they need it,” she said. “Our focus is really on trying to provide as much care locally as possible.”

For those who did not have the opportunity to partake in the town hall, the FAQ and other documents will be available on the hospital's website. And while future Telephone Town Halls will be arranged, Reugg added that they want people to know they are always willing to answer questions.

“As health care organizations, we are always there for the people; we are always trying to put patients first, but we need to know when we're meeting that and when we're not,” she said. “We're happy to receive positive feedback, but we're also happy to receive feedback that's not so positive. If someone hasn't had that exceptional experience every time, we want to know.”