

Headwaters getting positive reaction from Caledon community

By Bill Rea

Headwaters Health Care Centre officials are excited about a pending expansion to their Orangeville facility.

Hospital President and CEO Liz Ruegg gave Caledon councillors an update of the progress that's been made at the facility.

The issues she raised included financial ones, as she expressed a feeling that they are being penalized for being efficient.

Ruegg said "exceptional experience every time" is part of the vision they have for the hospital.

Although they have had to cut the number of beds from 87 to 83 to meet their budget, Ruegg said they have 607 staff, with 74 active and about 100 associated physicians. There are also about 275 volunteers.

The hospital has a annual operating budget of about \$57 million.

She also said that in terms of community size, the emergency department at Headwaters is as busy as one in Toronto.

The community served by the facility has a population of about 135,000, and she said that population is rapidly aging. That will mean the coming years will see an increased need to coordinate services, such as when it comes to assisting people in their homes.

As well, she said transportation issues in the community is another concern.

For the 2013-14 fiscal year, Ruegg said the hospital had a record 40,746 emergency visits and 5,658 inpatient admissions. There were also 17,356 outpatient visits, 743 babies delivered 153 heart attacks treated 1,018 chemotherapy treatments (an increase of about 24 per cent) and 586 cataract surgeries. She also said the number of outpatient visits has grown too.

As well, Ruegg said the ambulatory care, clinics and telemedicine services mean patients have been spared travelling a collective total of thousands of miles to facilities elsewhere, like Toronto.

Among other improvements have been the setting up of a satellite clinic with William Osler Health System to provide treatment for chronic kidney disease. That's operating twice a week and she's hoping that will increase.

She also pointed to the success of the Caledon Specialists Clinic, which has been operating in Bolton through partnership with the Central West Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) and Caledon Community Services (CCS).

"We're a highly efficient hospital," Ruegg declared, adding it's accredited with exemplary standing and has obtained Ontario Laboratory Accreditation. She also pointed to low emergency department wait times, commenting the hospital has ranked within the top three in Ontario in that regard three years in a row.

As well, Ruegg said the patient satisfaction ratings are high.

Ruegg said the plan for the next three years is to keep an eye on current trends and to work with partners like Osler and the Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) to continue providing high-quality, compassionate care.

But she also pointed out that there's no overall funding increase for hospitals expected for at least another two years, which means they're going to have to find another \$1 million every April. As well, Ruegg pointed out about 19 per cent of the staff will be eligible to retire in the next five years, but added not everyone feels like retiring at 55 or 65.

She said they plan to keep making their case to the LHIN, as well as the Province, arguing the hospital is efficient and should be rewarded for that.

The facility has seen no expansion since 1997, Ruegg said, and they are looking to add on roughly 8,200 square feet. That will enable an increase in the number of patients they can get through the new orthopaedic surgeries. There will also be expanded oncology and chemotherapy programs, as well as a fourth operating room.

Ground breaking for the expansion is expected in January 2015.

Ruegg also expressed appreciation to council for donating some of the proceeds from their annual golf tournament to the hospital.

Mayor Marolyn Morrison was sympathetic to the financial issues, commenting that efficiently-run municipalities find it hard to get grant money. "They give it to the people who, I guess, are less efficient, shall we say.?"

Councillor Richard Paterak had praise for the efforts at Headwaters to make visiting a hospital a positive experience.

"Your staff really puts people at ease," he said.