

Headwaters reflects on anniversary of pandemic as it continues to focus on safety of staff and patients

By Rob Paul

With the passing of the two-year anniversary of the World Health Organization (WHO) declaring COVID-19 a pandemic (March 11, 2020), Headwaters Health Care Centre remains alert to the threat of the virus to the community.

When the pandemic began, Headwaters mobilized to prepare for the challenges to come and continues to stay prepared for more after 24 months of dealing with COVID-19.

"We established an Emergency Operations Centre on March 13 (2020) and spent the next week adapting and ramping up Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) protocols and supplies, adjusting service delivery levels, and organizing our resources to respond to the ever changing information available and demands on the health care system," said Kim Delahunt, Headwaters President and CEO, and Dr Peter Cino, Chief of Staff and VP of Medical affairs. "By March 19, 2020, along with our community partners, we had our first external COVID-19 Assessment Centre set up in the parking lot to administer COVID-19 tests.

"As we took these steps to secure our ability to continue to meet the health care needs of our community, we received an extraordinary outpouring of support from those we serve. Businesses and individuals came forward with much-needed PPE for staff and patients, deliveries of food for staff who were working long hours 'magically' appeared and donations to the Headwaters Health Care Foundation to support our efforts to respond to the pandemic rolled in. That community support has been unwavering for the past two years and we are truly grateful to operate in such a generous and caring community.

"We also strengthened and established new connections with our community health care and social services partners. Those partnerships remain invaluable as we continue to face pandemic-related challenges along with the ongoing evolution of health care in Ontario. We are incredibly appreciative of the collaboration and partnerships with those organizations and agencies.

Over the last two years, the primary areas Headwaters serves (Dufferin County and Caledon) have seen over 11,000 cases of COVID-19 which has made the protection of patients and staff that much more difficult. To date, Headwaters has seen the death of 25 patients due to COVID-19 and 171 members and physicians test positive.

"There have been many ups and downs as COVID-19 variants led to surges in cases placing a strain on health care and community resources and as situations changed rapidly," said Delahunt and Cino. "We have adjusted our services and adapted in a myriad of ways to ensure continuity of health care. It hasn't been easy, and the toll it has taken on the mental health of both our community and staff cannot be understated. We know it has been hard and we have done our best to ensure that those we serve can continue to rely on Headwaters for the quality health care for which we are known. We are resilient and we continue to persevere.

"The ability to continue to care for patients as we have would not have been possible without the dedication, professionalism and strength of the Headwaters staff and physicians. From those behind the scenes to those providing direct care to patients, each member of the Headwaters team has gone to extraordinary lengths and endured exceptional circumstances to do so. We have relied tremendously on our staff and physicians to take on extra duties and shifts. We know this had added pressures at work and at home. We extend heartfelt thanks to all of them."

With the Government of Ontario no longer requiring proof of vaccination for specific indoor settings as of March 1 and planning to remove mask mandates on March 21, Headwaters will continue to follow clear health and safety measures to keep staff and patients safe as it begins to return to its pre-pandemic protocol.

"As we look ahead to another new phase of the pandemic, with easing of mask mandates and proof of vaccination protocols, we are cautiously optimistic about the year ahead," said Delahunt and Cino. "Headwaters will maintain mask and screening protocols until

further notice. We are, however, extremely pleased to welcome back our in-hospital volunteers in a gradual and phased approach later this month. We have also updated our visitor policy but are not yet able to offer open visitation.

?We continue to urge caution in the community. Please follow hand washing guidelines and any COVID-19 safety protocols that are recommended. It is also completely acceptable to continue wearing a mask in situations where you feel more comfortable even if it isn't required. If you aren't vaccinated, please talk to your doctor or another health care professional about the benefits of vaccination; we know they have helped turn the tide of the pandemic.?

At press time, three confirmed inpatients with COVID-19 and 305 inpatients who have tested positive to date, as a result, Headwaters will continue to treat the pandemic with the utmost caution.

?At Headwaters, we will continue to remain vigilant in protecting our patients and staff against the virus,? Delahunt and Cino said. ?The hospital is a safe place to be if you need to visit or stay with us, and we will continue to do everything we can to stay that way. Thank you for your ongoing support as we recognize this milestone date of the pandemic.?

For more information on protocol at Headwaters Health Care Centre, visit www.headwatershealth.ca/.