

New Health Link will help to coordinate patient care

By Bill Rea

People requiring medical care, especially the elderly, often have differing needs, requiring different doctors.

And sometimes one part of their care can conflict with another.

A new effort was launched late last month in Bolton to try and combat that.

Brampton West MPP Vic Dhillon was on hand at the recently opened Caledon Specialists Clinic to help make the announcement of the Bolton-Caledon Health Link. It will serve high-needs patients in Caledon areas of the Central West Local Health Integration Network (LHIN).

"This is certainly exciting news for Bolton and Caledon," declared Maria Britto, board chair of the LHIN.

The aim of the Health Link is to provide better coordination of care for high needs patients, as it brings together all health providers in the community.

Dhillon pointed out that the top five per cent of highest needs patients in Ontario, including seniors with multiple needs, use up about two-thirds of the health care budget. "In many cases, this cost is because of over-duplication of services," he said, adding in a lot of cases, people make frequent visits to emergency rooms because they don't know where else to go.

The establishment of Health Links represents something that is more responsive to patients' needs.

He cited the example of a senior with early stages of dementia, as well as diabetes. Such a patient would have multiple care providers, requiring various appointments and the taking of different medications.

"In many cases, these providers in the circle of care aren't talking to one another to ensure the best possible care," Dhillon observed, adding in some cases, the patients end up in hospitals, receiving the most expensive care available.

Health Links will help make sure care is provided on an individualized model, in which the patient has input. Dhillon added there will be a care coordinator to make sure medication is being taken when it's supposed to be, and to be available for consultation and guidance.

He added the Province is providing up to \$1 million to help get this Health Link established. Dhillon said there are 37 of these Health Links up and operating in Ontario.

"It's incredible progress for an initiative that started less than two years ago," he remarked.

"This new Health link will make it easier for seniors and patients with complex conditions to get the care they need," Dhillon added.

"The Bolton-Caledon Health Link will ensure that health providers in this area of the Central West LHIN are working together to improve patient outcomes for those who need care the most."

LHIN CEO Scott McLeod said this is the fifth and final Health Link to be established in the Central West area.

He added they hope they will be able to learn from the experiences of the other four Links to help make this one a success.

The coordination of the Health Link will be handled through Headwaters Health Care Centre, with Caledon Community Services (CCS) having a role as co-lead.

"We know it will be great for the residents of Bolton and area," he said.

McLeod added providers will be getting together in the coming months "to ensure we wrap care around the patient."

Headwaters President and CEO Liz Ruegg suggested people look ahead and see continued partnerships between all participants to make the Health Link work.

She said seniors and patients with complex needs require lots of supports. These Health Links, she said, will support families and care providers by bringing everyone together as a team.

She added Headwaters has had lots of successes with partnerships, and this is another one.

"This is great news for Bolton-Caledon, and another significant step forward in helping better coordinate care for seniors and other residents living with complex conditions in this area," Ruegg commented. "With today's announcement, we continue to see how local health system partners, including primary care, hospital and community providers, are coming together and putting patients first to ensure they get the best care possible, close to home."

"We are proud to be a provincial leader in advancing the Health Link model as a means for improving care for high needs patients and are pleased to be moving forward with the LHIN's fifth Health Link," Britto added. "We have worked swiftly to establish Health Links throughout the LHIN so that local residents with multiple chronic disease and other complex health conditions experience smoother transitions between the health service providers that are addressing their needs."



Central West LHIN CEO?Scott McLeod, Headwaters President and CEO?Liz Ruegg, LHIN?Board Chair Maria Britto and Brampton West MPP?Vic Dhillon were all on hand recently for the opening of the Bolton-Caledon Health Link.Photo by Bill Rea