

Social services and health sector partner to help children and youth

A unique partnership between health and the social services sector has been formed to support family doctors in meeting the growing needs in the community.

The second annual Physician Conference on Community Mental Health was held Feb. 12 at the Mississauga Convention Centre. The focus of this year's conference was children and youth.

Mental illness is the second leading cause of disability and premature death among Canadians. One in five will experience an episode of mental illness during their lifetime, 70 per cent of which will occur during childhood or adolescence. Early intervention and prevention are critical. Family physicians are one of the first points of intervention. Both patients and their doctors in Peel face a confusing system and significantly long wait lists as mental health services are not currently able to meet demand.

In 2014, the United Way of Peel Region published 'Mapping the Mental Health System in Peel Region.' commented United Way of Peel President and CEO Shelley White. 'We see the impact of mental health and addictions in our hospital emergency departments, our work places and our schools. We need to significantly increase access to community based mental health services in Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon to meet the needs of our growing, diverse communities.'

Mental health care is a specific component of the chronic disease spectrum that requires special attention as we plan for the future,' observed Dr. Rose Geist, closing keynote speaker at the conference and chief of mental health at Trillium Health Partners. 'The mental health system is spread across sectors, creating a confusing system for those who require treatment. It can be tough to navigate for both patients and family doctors. It's important that all partners come together to make it as easy as possible to get help.'

The purpose of the conference was to identify new trends and developments in the diagnosis and management of mental illness; inform and engage physicians regarding available resources and tools in the community and to determine best practices in navigating through mental health services. Participants were also able to hear first-hand from a panel on their lived experiences with mental health.

'Mental illness affects a lot of young people. It is important to hear from those directly impacted by it,' said Arthur Gallant, a youth panel speaker. 'I was happy to be able share my first-hand experience with experts and community service providers who are working towards this important issue.'

'Awareness of the mental health and addiction services and tools in place in our community is critical to support primary care, enhance their knowledge of system partners and ensure better access to services in our community,' commented Bill McLeod, CEO of the Mississauga Halton Local Health Integration Network (LHIN). 'The Mississauga Halton LHIN is committed to bringing together our health partners, primary care and social services, and fostering a collaborative environment that puts patients first, promotes optimal health, and delivers high quality person-centred care.'

The conference was a community-led initiative in partnership with the United Way of Peel Region, Trillium Health Partners, Peel Children's Centre, Canadian Mental Health Association, Dr. Colin Saldanha, Centre for Addictions and Mental Health, Peel Newcomer Strategy Group, Peel Addiction, Assessment and Referral Centre and funded by Mississauga Halton LHIN, Pfizer and BMS. It hosted more than 100 attendees, primarily family physicians from Peel Region. The conference presented experts on the topic of youth mental health, cultural sensitivity and mental health, local resources available through the Mississauga Halton LHIN, as well as a panel of speakers with lived experiences.