

William Osler Health System ends Code Orange as it extends Peel Memorial closure

By Rob Paul

William Osler Health System called a Code Orange across its hospital network last week after an influx of COVID-19 patients caused staffing challenges.

The Code Orange was called on Monday, January 3 and declared over on January 5.

A Code Orange is used to respond safely and effectively to a disaster external to the hospital that is likely to increase the capacity and use of hospital resources and is used to manage three different scenarios: mass casualty incidents; chemical, biological, radio-nuclear, explosive, or environmental events due to natural, accidental or intentional acts; and pandemics.

‘Osler has enacted all contingency planning and has reached Stage 2 of a Code Orange, which is typically used when demand outpaces capacity to ensure internal and external resources are deployed efficiently,’ said Dr. Naveed Mohammad, President and CEO, William Osler Health System. ‘This move will enable us to continue to provide high-quality care to our patients, and we are grateful to our staff, physicians and volunteers who have moved swiftly to enact our Code Orange policy and procedures. Osler continues to be a safe place to work and to receive care.’

Currently, 169 COVID-19 patients are being cared for in William Osler hospitals with 25 in critical care and over 4,000 have been cured for from Osler sites to-date. The lack of capacity led to the initial Code Orange.

‘Triggered temporarily due to demand outpacing capacity across the organization, Code Orange mobilized Osler’s staff, physicians, volunteers and system partners to work together to respond to the escalating situation and ensure the continued delivery of quality care to our communities,’ stated the hospital. ‘As soon as Osler was able to mitigate the urgency of the situation, we declared the code over however we continue to monitor circumstances.’

The Omicron variant being as contagious as it is has put many hospitals in tough staffing situations with nowhere to turn.

‘Like many hospitals, we are dealing with staff shortages as a result of COVID-19. With the Omicron variant spreading rapidly throughout the communities, it hasn’t spared our healthcare heroes either. And this is a fast and ever-changing situation,’ said Dr. Mohammad. ‘So, we are implementing a number of [measures] to ensure that we use our staff and physicians as efficiently as possible to support the greatest needs for our patients. Now, this includes some patient transfers when appropriate, and encouraging the presence of essential care partners. These are family members who can come in and be with patients.’

Though William Osler Health System declared the Code Orange over, the urgent care centre at Peel Memorial Centre for Integrated Health and Wellness has had its closure extended until at least February 1.

‘Due to increasing volumes in our Emergency Departments, further compounded by our extreme capacity and staffing pressures, Osler has made the very difficult decision to temporarily close its Urgent Care Centre at Peel Memorial until at least February 1, 2022,’ William Osler Health System stated. ‘This closure will help to direct the highly skilled staff and physicians to where demand is the greatest.’

The extended closure of Peel Memorial Centre for Integrated Health and Wellness by William Osler Health System caused Brampton East MPP Gurratan Singh, Brampton Centre MPP Sara Singh, and Brampton North MPP Kevin Yarde to release a statement calling on Premier Doug Ford to take action.

‘The temporary closure of Peel Memorial’s Urgent Care Centre is a scary development for patients and their families, and for people

across Brampton," they stated. "No one should have to worry that a loved one might not get the care they need should an emergency arise whether that's COVID, a heart attack or a broken bone. Our hearts today are with patients, as well as the millions of people who are anxiously hoping no one in their family has an emergency now.

"Doug Ford didn't staff up hospitals and retain, recruit, and return health care workers fleeing the field. For months, the Ontario NDP has called on the government to undertake an urgent blitz to recruit, retain, and return health care workers to the sector, but, instead, Ford made it worse with a low-wage law, Bill 124 that drove health care workers away. We'll keep fighting for the people of Brampton, urging Ford to scrap Bill 124 to return thousands of health care workers to the sector; give health care workers double pay; and ask the federal government, including the Canadian Armed Forces, for emergency staffing support in hospitals."