

EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT CRISIS

As we head into summer and holiday season there is an increased burden on hospitals, especially on our emergency departments (ED). Issues that have existed for years in our healthcare system are now at crisis levels. The reasons are multiple and seem to have more of an impact on rural hospitals.

The increased burdens on EDs include:

- Influx of people to cottages, campgrounds, travelling, summer activities
- Increased accidents due to travel or mal adventure during summer activities
- More elderly patients with age-related health issues which can be more complex, require a longer work-up and have an increased probability of being admitted to hospital.
- Increased number of orphan patients due to retiring physicians
- People delayed seeking medical attention due to the pandemic which has resulted in more complex medical issues when they present now.

There are other reasons as well that have been expressed in news articles in the press recently.

[An Ontario doctor says ERs are more stressed than he's ever seen. Data backs it up | CBC News](#)
[CHEO reports 'gridlock' as surge in visits to ER results in long waits | Ottawa Citizen](#)
['Granny dumping' troubles Ontario doctor who sees it most over the holidays | CBC News](#)

In addition to the increased summer burden on rural hospitals, there is a severe shortage of healthcare staff, especially in emergency departments. This includes doctors, nurses, radiology and laboratory technologists, housekeeping and dietary staff, etc.

These people have sacrificed more than most people realize to keep our EDs running. Most have young families and any increase in volume and acuity of patients presenting to the ED can have a domino effect on their personal lives as they work extra shifts, longer hours and give up vacations. The term 'burnout' does not fully describe the way they feel. They are physically, mentally and spiritually fatigued after stepping up month after month to maintain services for patients seeking medical attention.

Hospitals across Ontario and throughout Canada have been forced to **close their emergency departments** due to staff shortages.

As recent media releases across the province have suggested, this is not a hospital issue alone. This is a community issue. How the community uses the ED impacts how the ED functions. One of the biggest functions is being open 24/7 to be available to treat **true emergencies**.

[Solutions to Ontario emergency room waits are found beyond hospital ERs](#)

[An Ontario doctor says ERs are more stressed than he's ever seen. Data backs it up | CBC News](#)
[Health-care workers call for government help as burnout worsens and staff shortages increase](#)

The community can help in a number of ways

We appreciate the tremendous, ongoing support we receive from our community, which has rallied behind our hospital each time we put out a call or share a need. We are asking for your assistance once again.

- Try to use the Emergency Department for the services it is designed for — not as walk-in clinic for chronic non-urgent issues, but for **true emergencies**: chest pains, respiratory distress, broken bones, lacerations, accidents, new neurological symptoms, uncontrolled bleeding, loss of consciousness, physical trauma, etc.
- Many mild viral respiratory illnesses improve within three to five days. Do not present to the ED on your first day of symptoms unless you have difficulty breathing.
- Use the most appropriate hospital for your care. Do not travel to hospitals outside your catchment area for perceived decreased wait times. This will add to the burden of ED healthcare staff. The current reality is that you will be waiting at any hospital (no matter the time of day/night) a minimum of 2 to 5 hours for non-emergent service.

If you require **non-urgent care** please consider:

- If at all possible, seek medical care from your family physician. Local family physicians are being encouraged to keep and maintain same-day appointments for urgent non-emergent cases.
- Renfrew County VTAC, which was developed locally at the beginning of the pandemic to address non-urgent medical issues to unburden the ED system. It gives you access to nurses and physicians to address issues such as non-narcotic prescription renewal, minor burns, insect bites, rashes, infections, sprains and strains.
Renfrew County VTAC 1-844-727-6404
- For health advice, call the new Health Connect Ontario service at 811 or chat online with a registered nurse at [Health Connect Ontario](#).
- In emergency situations, call 911 as ambulances will always transport patients to the best location for care.

When you attend the hospital, please treat all healthcare staff and physicians with respect.

We understand that everyone is frustrated, tired and stressed. However, in the ED patients are triaged and treated based upon the acuity of their presentations. Wait times will be longer for non-emergent cases.

Verbal and physical aggression directed towards healthcare providers will not be tolerated.