



NEWS RELEASE

Surge in patient volumes reported at SFMH in Barry's Bay

Saint Francis Memorial Hospital in Barry's Bay reports that a surge in patient volumes in its Emergency Department, as well as in hospital bed occupancy rates, is continuing well into 2017.

At one point recently, the hospital could accept no new inpatients for a two-day period, says Mary-ellen Harris, Director of Patient Care Services at SFMH. "Our 20-bed unit was accommodating 21 patients, and we had four admissions in our Emergency Department with no pending discharges for 48 hours," Harris says. She adds that patient visits to the Emergency Department have also been higher than last year.

The spike in patient volumes has a variety of causes, says Harris, including an aging population, flu season, and patients waiting for transfer to other care facilities. Meanwhile the hospital continues to operate at 100% capacity. "Our first priority is patient safety," says Harris, adding that staffing adjustments are being made to meet patient needs. However, longer wait times may occur at times of high demand, Harris adds.

Hospitals across the province are experiencing a similar surge in patient volumes and wait times, according to a Jan. 10 letter sent by the Ontario Hospital Association to Ontario's Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. According to the OHA, "In recent months, ED wait times have been the longest on record since Ontario started measuring wait times nine years ago." Wait times for admission to hospital from the ED also "increased 13 percent from this time last year," the OHA said.

To reduce wait times and to avoid unnecessary visits to SFMH's Emergency Department, hospital staff offers the following advice to the public:

- Get the flu vaccine, which is available from physicians or many pharmacies
- Practise diligent hand hygiene to stay healthy and avoid catching the cold or flu
- Call your physician's office for non-emergency situations

The SFMH also advises all patients who are going to the Emergency Department to ensure that their medical information is up to date, and to take a list of all their medications, as well as any other important information such as allergies.

For patients who are being admitted to the hospital, SFMH staff advises that families plan ahead for a safe and timely discharge. On the day of discharge, patients should be picked up before 10 a.m. in order to give the next patient access to the hospital bed. If a patient cannot return home after an

acute admission, families need to plan for alternative placements. Hospital staff is available to assist families in these decisions.

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