

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday, April 21, 2020

Urgent support for long-term care & retirement homes in Niagara

Niagara Health (NH) is providing reinforcements in a number of ways to help protect our most vulnerable citizens from the spread of COVID-19 and support those working in long-term care and retirement homes in our region to safely manage positive cases of the virus in their facilities.

NH is working with our partners on an urgent basis, as follows:

- Mobilizing special teams to go into long-term care and retirement homes to share their expertise in outbreak management, including education in infection prevention and control measures and use of personal protective equipment. These teams include infectious disease specialists, physician specialists and nurses. NH experts, led by Derek McNally, Executive Vice President & Chief Nursing Executive, have already visited two homes in Niagara, at the request of Niagara Region Public Health, to provide advice and support.
- Redeploying NH healthcare workers on a temporary basis to provide expert advice or to support local long-term care and retirement home staffing needs where possible. NH's Human Resources team is currently asking for staff volunteers who would be interested in working in long-term care/retirement homes, while also balancing NH's staffing needs.
- Supporting the Medical Directors of 31 long-term care homes in Niagara through weekly video conferences with members of the NH Medical Advisory Committee (MAC). The MAC is made up of physician department chiefs from across the hospital who are providing medical advice to the long-term care Directors on the management of resident cases. "The Medical Directors at the homes are very appreciative of the support and advice, and we hope to continue working in partnership with them in this way on a more permanent basis," says Dr. Johan Viljoen, NH Chief of Staff.

Niagara Health also launched a pilot surveillance project in partnership with St. Joseph Health System to test all asymptomatic patients, residents and select staff to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and save lives. In the case of Niagara Health, this meant testing all 111 residents, whether they had symptoms or not, at our long-term care facility in Welland. This testing was completed late last week. All tests came back negative, and there is no COVID-19 in the facility. Testing will continue on a regular basis to support a safe environment and understand more about this virus.

"We are all seeing the devastating impacts of COVID-19 in long-term care and retirement homes across the country, and here in our region," says Mr. McNally. "It is increasingly important that we direct additional resources and efforts to protect this vulnerable population. We need to do everything we can, and on an urgent basis, to provide support and care for those who need help the most."

Last week, the provincial government announced its COVID-19 Action Plan for Protecting Long-Term Care Homes, which includes: aggressive testing, screening and surveillance; management of outbreaks in part through the use of support teams; and redeployment of healthcare workers from hospitals.

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