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IMPROVING PATIENT WAIT TIMES A PRIORITY FOCUS ACROSS ONTARIO



Dr. Alan Hudson provides an update on Ontario's Wait Time Strategy.

When the Central West LHIN assumed responsibility for planning, coordinating, integrating and funding health services on April 1st, it also inherited shared accountability for addressing health service wait times within the LHIN.

March 30th proved to be an opportune time then for Dr. Alan Hudson, Lead, Ontario Wait Times Strategy, Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care, to address an audience of board members and health service providers about progress being made both provincially and locally on wait times.

"This is a topic that certainly affects the LHINs," noted Dr. Hudson, referring to the 14 local health integration networks in Ontario. "You will play an increasingly significant role in shaping the way patients access care, and how that is managed will be crucial to effecting positive changes in wait times."

The Ontario Wait Times Strategy is designed to reduce wait times by improving access to health care services for adults in five key areas: cancer surgery, selected cardiac procedures, cataract surgery, total

hip and knee joint replacements, and MRI and CT Scans.

To date, the government has invested \$614 million in the Ontario Wait Times Strategy, some of which has flowed into the Central West LHIN to support William Osler Health Centre and Headwaters Health Care Centre in reducing wait times for these services. Each service has a priority target wait time associated with it.

Currently, the Central West LHIN ranks 6th among the 14 LHINs for progress made towards achieving the wait time target for knee replacement surgery. Among the other five key areas, we rank 7th for both hip replacements and CT scans, 10th for MRIs, 11th for cancer surgery, and 12th for cataract surgery.

"We are below the current provincial average for wait time targets achieved to date in CT, hips and knees," says Mimi Lowi-Young, CEO, Central West LHIN. "We are above the provincial average for MRI. So we're on the right track in most areas in terms of reducing the wait time for these services. But we know there is much more to be done."

One of the important factors in tracking wait times across the province has been the implementation of a Wait Time Information System (WTIS) and an Enterprise Master Patient Index (EMPI). Dr. Hudson is pleased that Phase II of the implementation was successfully completed one month ahead of schedule and on budget. By the end of December 2006, 55 hospitals representing 90 percent of the Wait Time

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Strategy funded cases were using a single provincial electronic wait time information system.

"By the end of last year, we had 1,400 surgeons across the province who were using the system and had entered wait time information on over 235,000 cancer, cardiac, cataract, hip and knee replacement surgeries and 1.1 million MRI and CT scans," says Dr. Hudson. "Building a single information system like this across Ontario is unprecedented and will result in major information developments in health care that go well beyond tracking wait times."

Dr. Hudson spoke to the importance of health service providers and health care professionals making changes in their existing processes as a means for improving wait times. *"How efficient is it for an orthopaedic surgeon to perform surgery on only 24 percent of the patients he sees in a year? If this is the case, it means he's spending much of his time assessing patients who are ultimately not surgical candidates and could be cared for by other health care professionals in the system,"* emphasizes Dr. Hudson. *"Ideally, we'd like to see that orthopaedic surgeon operating on 80 percent of the patients he sees, meaning we have to look at different ways of assessing patients to ensure they're being referred to*



Central West LHIN board members and health service providers learn about patient wait times provincially and locally.

the most appropriate health care providers."

The Central West LHIN will play a significant role in this regard as it works together with health service providers to ensure patients are receiving the care they need at the right time, in the right location and by the right health care professional.

"Ultimately, our aim is for equity for every patient across the province wherever you are," says Dr. Hudson.

For more information on wait times in the Central West LHIN and other areas of the province, please visit

www.ontariowaittimes.com

