

NEW

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Directions

Mental health centre divestment strengthens local governance and keeps with ministry's stewardship mandate



Trent Maracle photos

An aerial view of the Mental Health Centre Penetanguishene (MHCP) and the centre's scenic location on the shore's of Georgian Bay. The hospital is the last of 10 to be divested from the ministry to the public hospital sector. Photo left: Shown in a meeting is the MHCP Transition Team, which led the work to plan and prepare the many steps of the divestment process for the MHCP.

The Ontario government's decision to transfer the regional and provincial mental health programs of the Mental Health Centre Penetanguishene (MHCP) to a local hospital board is on track for completion on Dec. 15, 2008.

The move is part of the Ontario government's strategy that began in 1998 to divest provincial psychiatric hospitals to the public hospital system. The MHCP is the last of 10 psychiatric hospitals to be divested.

"This process is in keeping with the ministry's ongoing transition to stewardship," said Deputy Minister Ron Sapsford. "It provides opportunities for the ministry to continue strategic and long-term planning for the mental health sector, while allowing for the coordination and delivery of services to be overseen at the local community level."

"This restructuring provides for local governance and ensures that all employees will receive job offers," said Ruth Hawkins, executive lead, Direct and Corporate Services, and lead on the MHCP divestment.

All of the MHCP hospital services, facilities and jobs will remain in local communities, and all employees will remain in the same physical locations. MHCP employees will continue to have one employer and the receiving organization will be bound by existing collective agreements. "The divestment of the MHCP represents primarily a change of governance," Hawkins said.

The regional and provincial mental health programs of the MHCP will be transferred to a new entity which will operate under the same name, Mental Health Centre Penetanguishene.

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“This transfer recognizes the expertise and talent here at the MHCP, the dedication of our staff members and the excellent work they have done over the years,” said Sharon Zwicker, MHCP hospital administrator.

As the transfer proceeds, employees at the MCHP will be kept well informed. “As much detailed information as possible about this will be provided to staff as soon as the information is available,” Zwicker said. “We will use all communication channels to keep staff informed, including bulletins, newsletters, the intranet and a hotline.”

Zwicker acknowledged the divestment process has demanded a great deal of commitment and effort on the part of many of the hospital’s staff.

“I would like to commend employees for their dedication and contribution throughout this period. Their work has supported the divestment process, while at the same time their professionalism has remained focused on delivering the best possible patient care,” Zwicker said.

The MHCP divestment is a positive development for the hospital’s patients, staff and the community as a whole, Zwicker explained. “The hospital has waited a long time for this decision to be made and we are very pleased with the outcome,” she said. ■

Mental Health Centre Penetanguishene Service Area



The Mental Health Centre Penetanguishene (MHCP) is a 312-bed psychiatric hospital within the area of the North Simcoe Muskoka Local Health Integration Network. It has a 152-bed regional division that provides community, in-patient and forensic services similar to mental health services available in other regions of Ontario. The centre also has a 160-bed all-male facility, housing the province’s only maximum secure forensic program. The MHCP will continue to operate under the Mental Hospitals Act.

Divesting psychiatric hospitals: a chronology

Ontario’s Health Services Restructuring Commission (HSRC) was set up in April 1996 with a mandate to make decisions on restructuring Ontario’s public hospitals and recommendations to the ministry to improve the health services system. A decade ago, HSRC recommended that the ministry divest the province’s psychiatric hospitals to the public hospital sector to ensure seamless integration of mental health services.

The goals of transferring governance and operations of the psychiatric hospitals were to provide community-based delivery of services and help ensure people in need of mental health care provided by a hospital could access services close to home.

Originally, there were 10 psychiatric hospitals operated by the ministry. The divestment began in 1998 when the Queen Street Mental Health Centre in Toronto was transferred to the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Other divestments followed:

- Brockville Psychiatric Hospital divested to Royal Ottawa Hospital in October 2000
- Hamilton Psychiatric Hospital divested to St. Joseph’s Hospital, Hamilton in November 2000
- St. Thomas Psychiatric Hospital divested to St. Joseph’s Health Care, London in January 2001
- London Psychiatric Hospital divested to St. Joseph’s Health Care, London in February 2001
- Kingston Psychiatric Hospital divested to Providence Continuing Care Centre, Kingston in March 2001
- Lakehead Psychiatric Hospital divested to St. Joseph’s Care Group, Thunder Bay in June 2003
- North Bay Psychiatric Hospital divested to the Northeast Mental Health Centre, North Bay/Sudbury in November 2005
- Whitby Mental Health Centre, incorporated as a stand alone specialty psychiatric hospital with a community board of directors in March 2006
- Mental Health Centre Penetanguishene (MHCP) is the tenth and final provincial psychiatric hospital to be divested. The MHCP is to be transferred to a new entity which will operate under the same name on Dec. 15, 2008. ■