



WWLHINformation

BULLETIN THREE
November 2008

NAVIGATING THE HEALTH CARE SYSTEM



Rose Rainville and Janice MacDonald, Guelph General Hospital at the Champions of Change Symposium

One of our community's priorities for creating a better health care system is to improve access to services. Improving access, by making navigation of the system easier, was the topic of discussion at a recent symposium hosted by the WWLHIN and attended by over 200 health service providers.

What does 'navigating the system' mean? Your 'trip' through the health

care system usually begins with an appointment with your doctor. The doctor may order lab tests or arrange an appointment with one or more specialists. Hospitalization may be required, followed by some type of after-care – perhaps re-hab, more specialist visits, and possibly short-term or long-term care at home or in a facility.

While usually quite straightforward, this 'navigation' can be complicated by nervousness or misunderstanding about one's condition (is the individual able to give correct, consistent information?). Some individuals may have additional challenges – they may be frail or sickly, cannot drive or get around easily, do not have family or friends to help, English is not a first language or there are cultural or religious considerations.

In 2006, the WWLHIN undertook a series of town halls and conducted citizen surveys. One of the questions asked was "I know where to get information if I have questions or concerns about my health. I get good coordination of care and I believe it is easy to move through the local health care system when a number of services are required." With a scale of 1 – 6 with one being 'unacceptable' and six being 'excellent, almost 60% of respondents rated the current state at three or less. We have a problem! We have to find 'made in Waterloo-Wellington' solutions!

Speakers at the symposium addressed the issue of navigating our health care system. Cathy Fooks, President and CEO of *The Change Foundation*, a respected health policy think tank, presented highlights from a recent report, *The Puzzle Maker*, that looks at patient and caregiver perspectives on navigating health services in Ontario.

David Murray, CEO of the *Waterloo Wellington Community Care Access Centre* (WWCCAC) spoke of how CCACs are addressing the issue of making it easier to access services.

Gebre Berihun and Alida Abbott from the *Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre* (KDCHC) spoke about three initiatives particular to the multicultural community – *Community Health Helpers*, *Community Coalition on Refugee and Immigrant Concerns*, and *Strengthening Mental Health in Cultural-Linguistic Communities*.

Sandra Hanmer, CEO, WWLHIN spoke about how the WWLHIN, with community partners, is moving towards solutions.

Participants at the symposium then addressed two questions, "what navigation problems have you experienced, and what steps can we take to address the challenge." Their broad-reaching comments are posted on the WWLHIN website.

These presentations are available for viewing at www.wwlhin.on.ca. More information is also available at www.changefoundation.ca; www.ccac-ont.ca and www.kdchc.org.

We are in an era when health care consumers want to play a more significant part in decision making related to their own care. Health service providers have to provide the tools. We must also accommodate the most vulnerable – those who do not have the ability to navigate on their own.

In addition to the initiatives at the WWCCAC and the KDCHC, there are many system navigation-related activities in our community including (but are certainly not limited to):

- *The Health e Connections* project – an easy-to-use and accessible patient information system that will address the frustration of being able to access personal health information in a timely manner.
- *The Flo Collaborative* – a provincial initiative looking at system navigation and information flow between service providers to the patients' benefit. Two hospitals and the CCAC are participating in this project in the WWLHIN.
- *The Health Human Resources Council* – is looking at attracting and retaining the human resources necessary for quality care and helping patients travel the many pathways of the health care system.
- *Identifying or developing standard tools and measurements* that allow for automation and continuous flow of information across the system.
- *Centralized information referral and intake* – basic services that list client information such as CCAC intake services, and registries for primary care settings.
- *Discharge planning and transition planning* – easing the movement from one level of care to another.
- *Telephone, face-to-face, internet support* – including elder abuse hot lines, reference libraries in health care agencies, case management support for clients, information on websites and patient portals.

These are some of the initiatives currently underway. The work at the symposium will lead to more ideas, more solutions and more partnerships amongst the WWLHIN, health service providers and users of the system. We must all work together to ensure that we continue to "Live and Live Well in Waterloo Wellington."

More Information

For more information about the WWLHIN please visit our website at www.wwlhin.on.ca or contact the office for our publications and information.

Board Meetings Are Open To The Public

You are invited to attend the WWLHIN board meetings. The meetings begin at 6 pm and usually run to 9 pm. Meeting dates are Nov 27 at the Cutten Club in Guelph, the time and date of the December meeting is to be determined. Following meetings are Jan 22, Feb 26, Mar 26, April 23, May 28 and June 25 - locations to be determined. Check the website or contact the office for more information.

WWLHIN Board of Directors:

Kathy Durst, Chair; Paul Truex, Vice-Chair; Paul Holyoke, Bill Blackie, Bruce Schieck, Ken Whyte, Mary D'Alton, Glenna Heggie and Don Ross.

Congratulations to Sandra Hanmer, CEO, WWLHIN



Sandra was the recipient of a Kitchener Waterloo Oktoberfest Women of the Year Award – in the Professional category. "I am honoured by this award and accept it acknowledging and thanking the people I work with who made this possible."

LIVE AND LIVE WELL IN WATERLOO WELLINGTON

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