

Health Network and partners collaborate on first phase of a new model to transfer non-urgent patients

By Tom Sasvari - Sep 9, 2016

MANITOULIN—A patient-focused model to help get Northerners to and from their community hospital for non-urgent health care appointments at larger hospital referral centres will begin in the new year. The new model includes patients on Manitoulin Island.

“Northerners want better coordinated care especially when they are older and need to travel long distances from their home community hospital to a larger hospital for tests or specialist consults,” said Louise Paquette, CEO, North East Local Health Integration Network (NE LHIN). “After several years of hard work between the NE LHIN and area partners, this new model will help hospitals improve patient flow while getting patients to and from hospital-based medical appointments quickly and safely.”

This made in the North solution addresses a long-standing problem of patients being delayed at larger hospitals as they await a return trip by ambulance to their home community. Currently, across Northeastern Ontario, virtually all long-distance non-urgent patient transfers are done using ambulances, which often means a return ride isn't promptly available if the ambulance is called out to respond to an emergency.

The initial routes to be phased in were selected based on a number of factors including the readiness of the area providers. Starting in early 2017, dedicated multi-patient vehicles will operate to and from both Timmins and District Hospital and Health Sciences North in Sudbury, including: Elliot Lake to Espanola to Sudbury (165 kilometres), Mindemoya to Little Current to Espanola to Sudbury (163 kilometres), Kapuskasing to Smooth Rock Falls to Timmins (166 kilometres), and Cochrane to Iroquois Falls to Matheson to Timmins (224 kilometres).

"This is good news that a permanent non-urgent patient transfer model is in sight," stated Mike MacIsaac, chief of paramedic services for the Manitoulin-Sudbury EMS, on Tuesday. "This has been something that we have been studying for quite a time with the NE LHIN. "We were one of the successful applicants for a pilot project to transfer non-urgent patients that was put in place in 2013. This is the fourth year this program has been in place-so it has taken four years time to have a permanent model established. "He explained a consultant had originally been hired by NE LHIN that helped to develop the routes to be established. "This is part of the stage implementation the consultant did on the desired routes, and it shows the value these routes have been providing."

"This is good news, we are now going to have a more permanent model of non-urgent patient transfer service," said Mr. MacIsaac. "From a District Services Board aspect we are happy NE LHIN has taken this approach, and that it has shown that there is merit in non-urgent patient transfer service," he said, noting partners in the local set up have included the Manitoulin Health Centre and Espanola Hospital.

"The current model that we have been using that will now be on a permanent basis is making a difference," said Mr. MacIsaac. "Response times are better; at the six month point of the pilot project a patient customer satisfaction survey was taken, and there was a lot of good comments about patients getting to appointments on time. It is a good system and it is really good news it is going to continue long term."

The model is being put in place by the NE LHIN's Non-Urgent Patient Transportation Leadership Working Group, which has worked to analyze the scope of the challenge, test pilots, and develop a new model.

Next steps will focus on finalizing the plan between the LHIN, participating hospitals and Emergency Medical Services (EMS); selecting a transportation service provider; designing and establishing dedicated non-urgent patient waiting areas in Timmins and Sudbury; and setting up the central non-urgent patient transportation dispatch function for the region.