

Pilot project will allow palliative care patients calling 911 to choose at home care

By **Tom Sasvari** - May 14, 2021



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ESPANOLA—Palliative care patients calling 911 can now choose care at home thanks to a new pilot project, and that is good news for patients says the chief of paramedic service for the Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board (DSB).

“It is important for us as paramedics that patients have the opportunity to have a quality end of life approach,” said Paul Myre. “This project allows us to treat the patient’s symptoms at their home instead of having to disrupt their time at home with family, or having to transfer them to a hospital.”

The one-year pilot project will help protect hospital capacity while Ontario responds to the third wave of COVID-19, according to a May 6 provincial government announcement.

The Northeastern Ontario pilot project is for emergency medical services in the District of Manitoulin-Sudbury, Cochrane District, District of Nipissing, City of Greater Sudbury, Algoma District, Parry Sound, the District of Timiskaming, the Weeneebayko Area Health Authority and the District of Sault Ste. Marie.

Currently, paramedics bring 911 patients to hospital emergency departments even if other appropriate care treatments are available.

“Under the innovative patient care model pilot, eligible palliative care patients who call 911 will have the option to receive treatment at home. Paramedics specially trained in symptom management, including pain or shortness of breath, agitation, terminal congested

breathing, nausea and vomiting will have the ability to treat patients at home should they choose,” explained a news release. “Paramedics then directly coordinate with the patient’s primary palliative care team or with a local hospice where the patient is registered, to ensure that they are able to receive longer-term supports and wrap-around care. The patient will remain in ultimate control of the care they receive and can at any time request to be taken to the emergency department.”

Mr. Myre said, “this change is important to me personally. As an advanced care paramedic, I and other paramedics have responded to calls from patients who, for instance, have terminal cancer. They fight pain constantly and when they call we have had to go their home, put them on a stretcher, then transfer them by ambulance into Sudbury. Within three minutes we have taken them away from their home and family to ease their suffering. This is really near and dear to my heart.”

Mr. Myre said, “after training we are looking at a June/July start for the program.”

After the first year, the pilot program will be evaluated to assess the outcomes and identify where adjustments may be needed.

“In rural and Northern Ontario, paramedics have long been invaluable resources in providing wrap-around services across our vast geography,” said Parry Sound-Muskoka MPP Norm Miller.

He said the announcement will allow paramedics to empower patients by putting them in control of care decisions.

“It’s an exciting project,” said Mr. Myre. “This is long overdue, and its great to see the government really behind the project.”
