

Background/ Communiqué

SMALL COMMUNITY HOSPITAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT STUDY

January 27, 2009

The Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network (ESC LHIN) commissioned Hay Group Health Care Consulting, to study our three small community hospital Emergency Departments. This study began in August 2008 and included the Charlotte Eleanor Englehart Hospital Site, Bluewater Health (Petrolia); Leamington District Memorial Hospital; and Sydenham Campus, Chatham-Kent Health Alliance (Wallaceburg).

The study reviewed the current operations and practices of the small community hospital Emergency Departments of Chatham-Kent, Essex, and Lambton Counties. The end goal of this study was to provide recommendations for the LHIN to consider for future planning in delivering quality, sustainable Emergency Department services.

It had been identified that the small community hospital Emergency Departments were experiencing similar pressures with:

- a) Recruiting and retaining well-trained emergency physicians
- b) Variable or low volumes of patient visits
- c) Operating challenges
- d) Challenges in connectivity to other services

The study was a pro-active response by the ESC LHIN to identify options for addressing these pressures. In setting objectives for the Hay Group Study and subsequent LHIN review and consultations, the study was intended to enhance the ESC LHIN's understanding of operations and the dynamics of the Emergency Departments being examined. Specifically, the LHIN identified the following goals:

- 1) Develop a baseline for performance, operations and sharing of "Best Practices"
- 2) Assist in determining the options for next steps in order to make the Emergency Departments sustainable entities
- 3) Strive to eliminate uncertainty and advise on the use of limited resources and future investments
- 4) Demonstrate, through this action, the LHIN's responsibility and accountability for the system

Study methodology and process

Hay Group Health Care Consulting conducted a comprehensive study of the three EDs that included both quantitative and qualitative analysis of data from each site:

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Quantitative data included: a clinical profile explaining patient volumes, demographics, and presenting complaints; the triage process and admission/transfer/discharge practices; and, admission rates and referral volumes.

Qualitative review included: a validation of quantitative findings; a review and analysis of the Emergency Department operations through interviews and meetings with physicians, nurses, administration, and other support staff; and, a study of management practices looking at organizational structure, administrative processes, Emergency Department bylaws and rules, etc.

The analysis and review also included a comparison to peer organizations.

A steering committee was recruited to provide commentary back to Hay Group regarding the facts presented in their report. The committee was not requested, nor intended, to provide an endorsement of the report itself, but rather to act as a secondary audience, who benefit from internal operational perspectives, to review the document and ensure there were no significant issues with the facts presented. The committee was made up of Hay Group consultants involved in the study, Erie St. Clair LHIN staff and Emergency Department Lead (Dr. David Ng), as well as an ED physician and an ED Manager from each of the participating hospitals.

Hay Group's Presentation & Report

The final report and presentation to the ESC LHIN Board of Directors was done by Dr. Dubinsky of Hay Group Health Care Consulting. In his presentation, Dr. Dubinsky identified the following challenges at each site:

Leamington District Memorial Hospital (LDMH)

- Length of travel time to Windsor
- High volume of primary care for migrant workers
- Nurse and physician staffing
- Timely transfer of appropriate patients to Windsor

Charlotte Eleanor Englehart Hospital Site, Bluewater Health (Petrolia)

- High volume of primary care
- Renovations to the ED required
- Physician staffing at risk (due to pending retirement and reduced time commitments; recruitment)
- Nurse staffing needs to be increased
- Transfer of patients to Sarnia due to lack of consultants (physician specialists) on site for complex conditions



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Sydenham Campus, Chatham-Kent Health Alliance (Wallaceburg)

- High volume of primary care
- Major renovations to the entire hospital facility and ED required
- Physician staffing challenged (due to dependence on Locum and casual staffing; recruitment)
- Transfer of patients to Chatham due to a lack of consultants (physician specialists) on call

To address these challenges, the Hay Group made a number of recommendations specific to each site. They include:

Leamington District Memorial Hospital (LDMH)

Increase physician and nurse staffing, enhancing community services and establish greater collaboration with Windsor hospitals to support patient referrals

Charlotte Eleanor Englehart Hospital Site, Bluewater Health (Petrolia)

Transition to an Urgent Care Centre model

Sydenham Campus, Chatham-Kent Health Alliance (Wallaceburg)

A comprehensive primary health care centre should be considered as an alternative to the current ED model

The LHIN acknowledged that the broader system impacts of these recommendations would still need consideration and that consultations to discuss these recommendations or other alternatives are required prior to making any decisions.

Next Steps

With the submission of the final Hay Group report on the EDs, the ESC LHIN is entering into a secondary review and consultation phase. Over the next three to four months the ESC LHIN will be meeting with key stakeholders to collect feedback on the report; identifying and filling gaps in information available around the EDs and the broader system; gathering input from the general community; and, conducting an impact analysis on proposed changes. This work will lead to the submission of ESC LHIN-endorsed recommendations to be considered by the Board of Directors. It is expected that this process will be completed by June, 2009.

For further information please contact:

Zoja Holman, Senior Community Engagement Consultant, 886-231-5446 ext. 225



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