

LHIN BOARD MOVES ON FROM ED STUDY

Attention to turn to the bigger issue of primary health care

NEWS

January 26, 2010

CHATHAM-KENT - The Erie St. Clair Local Health Integration Network (ESC LHIN) Board of Directors received an update on the Small Community Hospital Emergency Department Study where LHIN staff recommended moving on from the study to focus efforts on improving primary health care.

Gary Switzer, CEO, and Ralph Ganter, Senior Director of Planning and Integration, presented the findings since the initial Hay Group report was issued one year ago. The ESC LHIN has continued to look at data, listen to the suggestions of the community and seek the advice of experts in the field in preparation for the release of guidelines from the Rural and Northern Health Care Panel.

By focusing on primary health care, the LHIN is ensuring that people's health care needs are met in a more appropriate setting than Emergency Departments (EDs). A key finding was that EDs have increasingly become safety nets for a challenged primary health care system. Good primary health care is the foundation of keeping people healthy and includes chronic disease management and prevention, and treatment of acute non-life threatening conditions.

It was also announced that the LHIN will be assembling a Primary Health Care Task Group. The group will assist the LHIN in planning a better primary health care system in Erie St. Clair and the Terms of Reference will be presented at the February Board meeting.

LHIN officials assured the Board there are no plans to close any small hospital in Erie St. Clair and that the hospitals will have to evolve to meet the health care needs of the community.

Next Steps:

- **Creation of a Primary Health Care Task Group** – a group comprised of a cross section of key stakeholders, community members and health service providers, representing a broad mix of skills, knowledge and perspectives to advise on directions to improve primary health care services in Erie St. Clair.
- **Clinical Services Review** – a review of clinical services across the region to improve integration and help plan for health human resources, capital investments, and clinical services (as identified in the LHIN's second Integrated Health Service Plan).
- **Submission of Emergency Department Contingency Plans** – plans to be submitted by the hospitals and approved by the LHIN that address how emergency services will be delivered in the scenario of an unforeseen closure due to extreme weather, inability to secure staff, etc.
- **Await Rural and Northern Health Care Panel Recommendations** - review and incorporate the panel's recommendations into a local plan as required, with the assistance of the Primary Health Care Task Group.

QUOTES

“One of the biggest health care challenges in small communities is primary health care. It was through our work and the community engagement from the ED study that we now know to focus our attention in this direction. The task group we will be assembling will help to look at the issue of primary health care and solutions that will be right for our community”

- Mina Grossman-Ianni, Chair, Erie St. Clair LHIN

“With respect to the study, our work is done until the Rural and Northern Health Care Panel provides their direction. In the mean time, the LHIN’s role will be to continue to ensure that the system functions so that people get safe and quality health care. Contingency plans will give us some security in knowing that if something happens we’re prepared.”

- Gary Switzer, Chief Executive Officer, Erie St. Clair LHIN

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Shannon Sasseville, Erie St. Clair LHIN, 1-866-231-5446 ext.
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www.eriestclairhin.on.ca