

Response to Southlake's PPE drive has been "wonderful": Foundation

Over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, residents across northern York Region and South Simcoe have come together in various ways to say thank you to the healthcare workers on the frontlines of this global fight, and they continue to do so.

Southlake Regional Health Centre sounded the call last month asking individuals and businesses large and small to help secure and donate personal protective equipment (PPEs) to the people who need them the most, but which have proven in recent weeks to be in increasingly short supply.

It was a call that the community has readily answered, according to Susan Mullin, President & CEO of the Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation.

'We have had an awesome response from the community on the PPE drive,' says Ms. Mullin. 'People from nail salons to car production lines have donated needed PPEs, in particular the masks' and it continues to be the masks that are of greatest concern, but we have had generous gifts. We've had more than 5,000 gloves that are on our list of PPE to be donated, there's well over 12,500 medical and surgical masks, and it probably exceeds that, but we haven't had a count of everything yet.

'What has been nice about that is we have had people calling saying, 'I think you can find this through a connection of mine, tell me exactly what you need.' People calling and reaching out has been one of the most moving things about it.'

Despite the significant community response, the need for all PPEs at Southlake continues, particularly the N95 masks which were, last week, at the heart of a trade dispute between the governments of Canada and the United States.

'Lots of businesses have reached out and the business community has been able to help us on the PPE drive,' Ms. Mullin continues. 'We have had donations from Seneca College's labs, which have donated products; that has been really helpful and it continues to be a priority. While the government is stepping up [with] the news that 3M will be allowed to export to Canada some of the N95 masks, which are the ones that are in particular short supply, it is good news they're coming to hospitals but until they are on my loading dock, I am not confident. We need to be able to see it to believe it is going to be available for our staff when they need it.'

Southlake continues to look at the myriad donations of PPE that have rolled in so far. Much of what has been contributed is different from the equipment hospital staff used before the start of the pandemic. Medical staff, for example, are usually fitted for a particular size of mask, and, as such, strict protocols are in place to make sure items donated meet

hospital standards.

?We have to do a lot of work to make sure that the donated masks meet the requirements and they are all ready and part of our contingency plan for us going forward,? said Ms. Mullin. ?We continue to encourage people who donate masks, in particular, we would be delighted to receive them. There are protocols in place and between our procurement team and also our instruction control team? they are reviewing all of the products that are brought in that are not part of our usual inventory and making sure they meet standards, either that they have authentication that we can verify and we also have to assess them for fit on faces as well.?

Outside of PPEs, there are other items members of the public can donate to make the fight a bit easier on our frontline healthcare workers, including hand lotion.

?It is really tough for people who are washing their hands dozens of times a day, so even little hotel-size bottles of hand lotion that are unopened are the kinds of things we're making available to our staff on an ongoing basis,? says Ms. Mullin. ?We continue to look for small, personal-sized bottles of hand sanitizer so nurses and other staff can use that at home to keep themselves and their families safe before they come back to the office.?

The community's response to Southlake's call for monetary donations has also been successful so far, although needs continue to grow.

By Thursday of last week, nearly 630 individual donors had answered the call, helping Southlake raise close to \$1.5 million of their \$3.5 million in identified needs.

?We have funded one-and-a-half of the portable isolation tents that are being delivered this week, we have a few ventilators that have been fully funded, but there is another eight that need to be funded,? says Ms. Mullin. ?We are also purchasing PPE where we can find it on the market.?

For more on current needs and ways you can help, visit southlake.ca/foundation and southlake.ca/foundation/donateCOVID-19.

By Brock Weir