

Flexible funds needed now more than ever at Southlake: Foundation

One of the positives to come out of the global pandemic is many of us have had to learn to be more flexible in our day-to-day lives.

It helped us get through the first wave, and it will help us get through this larger, perhaps even more challenging second wave, and it will help Southlake Regional Health Centre address the needs of the community as well, particularly in this season of giving.

The Southlake Regional Health Centre is currently in the midst of its "Better Begins Today" campaign, which aims to increase mental health capacity at the Newmarket-based hospital.

Launched earlier this fall with a \$7.5 million fundraising goal, the campaign aims to improve and increase spaces designed for individuals to heal.

"In many ways, this second wave is as much about mental health as it is about physical health," says Sheila Tilotta of the Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation. "We have all been isolated for a long time and it is no surprise that we're hearing from our partners, the clinicians in the hospital, that we're seeing increased visits related to mental health. This campaign is extremely timely as it improves spaces within our hospital and spaces are needed to heal.

"Southlake has always had the right people, the right professionals on the mental health team, but we haven't always had the right space. So, this campaign is about creating those spaces for healing. We're really focused on that and it goes hand-in-hand with this second wave."

Southlake always aimed to launch the "Better Begins Today" campaign in 2020, well before COVID-19 upended our reality. But, the pandemic has served to make that issue top of mind for so many more people.

"If you were to look back at the last decade at Southlake, we have revitalized a number of spaces in the hospital; we've built the new Cancer Centre which is now 11 years ago. Right before that, we had renovated and built out the new Regional Cardiac Centre, and when you look across the hospital at the spaces people have to heal, our mental health patients did not have the same quality of space that our cardiac and cancer patients had. It was determined that as we look at all the areas of Southlake, that was the area that really needed to be brought up to offer patients and clinicians that right space for healing."

The Emergent Mental Health unit opened in September, which has gone a long way to relieve pressure on Southlake's emergency department, says Ms. Tilotta. Once patients arrive, they are cleared and transferred to the new unit which offers a private room, access to washrooms and a shower. All told, it is a six-bed unit at present, but the goal of a 12-bed inpatient unit will allow more than 400 more stays per year at Southlake, plus the addition of a dedicated patio for the unit.

"When people are receiving treatment, they are often within the confines of four walls and they don't have a place they can go to within the program that would be a safe environment. Part of this is a new outdoor space because the ability to walk around in a non-medical setting is an important part of healing."

As much as Southlake is focused on their mental health campaign, however, their most important need at the present is flexible funding, that is, funds and donations that can be deployed by the hospital as needs arise and evolve.

"COVID has taught us that better than anything," says Ms. Tilotta. "The hospital has evolving priorities. One of the things they need is a C-Arm [X-Ray machine] which is something nobody ever sees and you're in the operating room and sedated. Nobody ever thinks to fund a C-Arm but it is a needed piece of equipment. At the same time, the priority today might end up being a ventilator versus that C-Arm. What we're really asking our community to do is to provide flexible funding that the hospital can prioritize and use as soon as possible.

?If someone is going to restrict their gift [to a specific area], we would request their restriction be to the mental health campaign, which is our number one priority right now? and the second level of restriction would be for priority equipment [for] the hospital. The hospital has a substantial equipment need and equipment is not funded by the Ministry of Health ? but by our community.?

As we enter into the holiday season, Ms. Tilotta says what frontline workers are emphasising as their greatest need is for people to abide by the health rules in place.

?We're in a Red Zone: Wear a mask, don't have more than five people in your house, follow those rules. While they truly appreciate the meals, parades and the drive-bys, they are tired ? they just want everyone to follow the rules and get through this. We keep hearing that over and over again.?

For more information on the Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation, visit southlake.ca/foundation.

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