

Over 900 doctors to lace up in Aurora and Newmarket to benefit Mental Health



By Brock Weir

Mental health issues have an impact on all areas of society ? from the family, to the wider community, and even the doctors treating those affected.

It can be felt in the home, the workplace, and in public, but so often people don't want to speak out about it, or plead their cases for better funding.

Over 900 doctors and medical students, however, will be lacing up and taking over Aurora and Newmarket next month from April 3 ? 5 to do something about it in the annual Docs on Ice tournament. In this, its 32nd year, the 2014 tournament is being organized by Southlake Regional Health Centre emergency room physician Dr. Chris Gannage. Since its inception in 1983 in memory of a doctor who lost his life in a car accident in Peterborough, what started off as a six team tourney has grown to over 50 individual teams raising over \$1 million for a variety of charities, including sports concussion programs, the Canadian Lung Association, and the Alzheimer Society.

This year, however, they have set a \$200,001 fundraising goal for their selected charity ? the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region.

?When I asked the guys on the team what they thought our charity should be, they were pretty unanimous in wanting to do something for mental health,? says Dr. Gannage. ?Mental health is an area that affects not just physicians who deal with it, but all families, and all elements of our society, in our workplace, in our homes, or friends we know and yet it is an area that is not often talked about.

?People will often talk about their cancer treatment or their heart attack, or a broken leg, and go on about the care they receive, but the sad thing about mental health is the burden or illness is so high, and yet so many people do not communicate around it. We wanted to create an awareness around mental health and also increase resources for it because it is woefully underfunded. Anyone who works in a care setting will understand mental health does not get the same resources that a lot of other areas do. It is changing for the better, but historically it has been very poor.?

According to Dr. Gannage, the Canadian Mental Health Association of York Region (CMHA) will use the funds received in the tournament for a ?pioneering? mental health initiative for youth, which is the first of its kind in Canada ? a mobile mental health bus for youth.

?We know that youth are not always willing to come forward and speak, so this bus is going to go out to them in their schools and community to reach those who are vulnerable,? he says, noting the doctors have set their unusually specific fundraising target of

\$200,001 after 2012's tournament organizers set a goal of exactly \$200,000 for the concussion program. "We doctors are not competitive at all!"

Dr. Gannage says he has been waiting years for the opportunity to bring this tournament to the Aurora and Newmarket communities and has secured ice space at the Stronach Aurora Recreation Complex in Aurora as well as the Magna Centre in Newmarket. The tournament has grown steadily over the years and while a comparative lack of hotels in the area was one stumbling block to overcome, the doctors agreed they would have no trouble filling up available hotels across York Region and making the 15 minute trek from wherever they land.

"I have always wanted to bring this to our community because I always wanted to give back," he says. "It is such a great cause and a lot of fun. After enjoying it for so many years, I thought it was our opportunity to contribute. Docs locally in Newmarket and Aurora have played every Wednesday for 20 years. We do it to blow off steam and hang out together. Organizing this is a lot of work, but we just felt the call to help out.

"For me, this is an opportunity to share in the greatness of our community - both the hospital community, but more so the community we live in.

Doctors work hard and we are devoted to the profession, but we don't often take time out for self. There is more than enough work to be done and your work week can just take over unless you try and take control over it yourself. Playing hockey is an example of trying to create that element of balance in our lives and this tournament is another example of trying to create that element of balance. It is something that is inked in and honoured every year and the guys look forward to it. It is all about charity, camaraderie and sportsmanship."

For more information on this year's Docs On Ice tournament, the CMHA, and volunteer opportunities, visit docsonice.ca.