

Southlake dedicates Emergent Mental Health unit in honour of NewRoads



It was a celebration of a job well done at Southlake Regional Health Centre as the local hospital dedicated its Emergent Mental Health Assessment Unit in honour of NewRoads Automotive Group.

The Newmarket-based auto leader has been a long-time key fundraiser for Southlake's mental health programs through several initiatives, most recently their annual NewRoads LakeRide. Their contributions have been essential to the hospital's capital campaign to create and open new mental health spaces and the October 12 event was to celebrate NewRoads and all those who made the transformation possible.

“Before this, our patients had to stay in the emergency department two days, three days, and sometimes you're talking about sleeping in a chair overnight before coming upstairs,” said Dr. Mahdi Memarpour, Southlake's Chief of Psychiatry.

The creation of a new assessment unit where patients can enjoy dignity and privacy was “amazing and very emotional for many people,” he said.

“When we started, on the very first day I looked at [the unit] and couldn't believe we had this,” he continued. “People would come up? to a modern facility here: a private room, shower, things that didn't exist [previously]. Now they have it and it is unbelievable in their recovery. From an emergency department where they had to sleep in a chair to something extraordinary. Many people who have sometimes been here before, for example a couple of years ago, can't believe the transformation. For that again, I would like to thank everyone who was involved, including people who really worked on designing it and especially the donors who really helped us build this. It serves the community well and it decreases the stigma that comes with psychiatric illness.”

The new space, added Aga Dojczewska, Manager of Inpatient Adult Mental Health and Emergent Mental Health Assessment Unit, is also being felt by staff.

“It is an incredible space,” she said. “A lot of the patients were coming in, after days of not taking care of themselves, and that shower that we have is such an incredible basic need that every one of us needs and we are addressing this by having this incredible space. Staff love working here. We are actually seeing they are coming to work and they are very satisfied with the level of care they can provide to every patient we have.”

All those who contributed to Southlake's capital campaign for mental health contributed to the “dignity of peace, privacy and security” for patients and their families, said representatives of the Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation.

“It was not even a full six months that we were in COVID when we really recognized our need for better spaces to bring our mental health care environment to modern standards and how urgent this was,” said Jennifer Klotz-Ritter, President and CEO of the Southlake Foundation. “I think we all remember the necessity of looking after mental health and wellbeing, especially during COVID, and that continues today. Our spaces at the time were really crowded, they were lacking what our clinicians and our staff would talk about as the basic necessities of care that happens – dignity, privacy, and in a therapeutic environment conducive to a healing journey.

“The demand exponentially grew. It was very challenging to undertake this campaign and it was a challenging decision to undertake this campaign when we were still in the first year of COVID, but I’ve always said that it is the donors and the supporters of the community who decide what is and is not acceptable when we’re trying to deliver healing and care to our communities.”

The fundraising goal, she added, was reached at the end of Southlake's last fiscal year and, this past February, opened the inpatient adult mental health unit to its first patients.

“We are so grateful you answered the call and stood by our side so we could bring [our talented clinicians and staff] the tools and environment they need in order to help our brothers, our sisters, our parents, our children, our family our colleagues, get the healing care they need when they need it,” concluded Klotz-Ritter. “This is an example of the extraordinary power of community, community investment, and philanthropy.”

As community contributors assembled for the unveiling a donor wall recognizing their donations and fundraising efforts, NewRoads CEO Michael Croxon, joined by Sharon Croxon, underscored the importance the Automotive Group places in mental health.

“Long before COVID, we at New Roads identified mental health as a growing need not only in our community but the world and decided to throw our collective weight behind raising funds for that initiative,” he said. “As we all know COVID just sort of exacerbated that need and it became even more prevalent and even more apparent we needed to up our game and do our part in this community that is so special to our organization to give back.

“I get the honour of representing NewRoads and, ultimately, I guess signing the cheques that go to Southlake, but I couldn't do that without Sharon and I couldn't do that without the 430 people who work in our organization, who staff it every day, who volunteer endlessly at our charity events.

“Most of my senior team is here today and I want to give a shout out to them as well because certainly without them we wouldn't have the capacity to give back in the way in which we give back. We're immensely proud to be part of the Newmarket community, we're immensely proud to have our name on the assessment unit upstairs.”

By Brock Weir
Editor
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter