

## Southlake seeks community input at Virtual Town Hall

By the middle of last week, Southlake Regional Health Centre had nearly 25 COVID-19 patients in the hospital, four of whom were ventilated in the Intensive Care Unit.

Compared to other points in the first and second waves, this is lower than it has been, but capacity remains an ongoing challenge at the local hospital ? and it was already a challenge well before the world had ever heard of COVID-19.

?COVID has only kind of heightened some of those challenges we have,? says Arden Krystal, President & CEO of Southlake Regional Health Centre.

Planning for the future and ensuring capacity as growth continues across York Region is a top-of-mind issue for the hospital and they are once again asking for input from the communities they serve.

On Wednesday, March 10, from 7 ? 8 p.m., Southlake Regional Health Centre will host a Virtual Community Town Hall co-hosted by Ms. Krystal and Dr. Charmaine van Schaik, Physician Leader, Maternal Child Program and Co-Medical Lead on the Vaccine Management Committee.

Coinciding with the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Town Hall will look back at challenges faced by Southlake over the last 12 months, look ahead to what future challenges might be, as well as solicit input on the hospital's new Master Plan for a new build.

?The one thing you don't have in a pandemic is an old building that has a lot of four-bed rooms and that is exactly what we have,? says Ms. Krystal. ?Because of that, we have had to reduce our bed capacity in many of our rooms in order to accommodate infection control standards and to isolate patients who are either suspected of having COVID or have confirmed COVID. It has really heightened a lot of the facility challenges that we already have, which is why we're trying to move forward as quickly as we can to get our Master Plan approved.?

Once the Master Plan is in place, Southlake can start planning for capital redevelopment within the community.

Over the last seventeen years, Southlake has had largely the same footprint and, in that time, they have increased their number of beds by approximately 36 per cent. Ms. Krystal says they are ?full to the brim? when it comes to looking after more patients.

?[One of] the ways we are dealing with capacity in the short term and medium term is we have learned through COVID there are a number of activities that don't necessarily have to happen on a hospital campus,? she says. ?With our Ontario Health Team, we have been planning for some time around making sure that we can do more virtual care, that there are certain activities we can hand off to our community partners because they, in fact, do them very well. I think we have learned a lot of lessons about how we can do things more efficiently, but no matter how much virtual care we still don't have enough space here. We're going to have to get a new development for this community sooner rather than later.?

The development of the Master Plan is ongoing. It has been driven not only by people's wants and needs, says Ms. Krystal, but also population and demographic data so they can plan for the future.

?Whether what we hear from the populations we serve is positive or negative, we take it all in, adjust it and try to make changes or to continue to make the things we're doing well stronger. I'll be talking to people about this master planning and our capacity challenges and ideas of how we can make that better. I will be talking to people about our Operating Budget, some of the challenges we have and some of the progress we have made.

?The communities Southlake serves has lost collectively about 19 per cent of their long-term care capacity due to changed rules for

infection control that affected the Class E and D homes, those older homes that have multi-bed wards. You can imagine losing 19 per cent of the beds, we already didn't have enough long-term care beds. That impacts us because it means that a patient waits longer in our hospital to go to a long-term care bed and that is where they need to go. All of these things are issues and I am happy to chat with anyone about them, as well as vaccination which is kind of our shining light right now. We're very involved in the vaccination effort at Ray Twinney Arena in partnership with public health and that is an exciting thing. For more on Southlake's Virtual Town Hall, visit [southlake.ca/townhall](https://southlake.ca/townhall).

**By Brock Weir** Editor Local Journalism Initiative Reporter