

Southlake welcomes first patients to new mental health unit

Southlake Regional Health Centre on Tuesday welcomed the first patients to its new mental health unit.

Years in the works and made possible through \$7.5 million raised by the community during its Better Begins Today mental health capital campaign, the new space is expected to significantly increase capacity at the local hospital and see more than 400 more patients this year.

With its completion, Southlake's total inpatient mental health capacity will increase from 24 to 37 beds and the new spaces are designed to be a brighter, warmer, and more welcoming.

'The brightness, the light coming in has a huge, huge impact on patients struggling with their recovery and being on that journey to wellness, says Aga Dojczewska, Manager, Adult Outpatient Mental Health and Emergent Mental Health Assessment Unit. 'The colours here are very encouraging and bright and everybody is noticing this is a good environment, that this is providing that lift and oomph that we need to start the journey to recovery.'

Among the features of the new unit highlighted by Dojczewska and Nathan Robinson, Southlake's Director of Capital Development, on a Monday tour were single-bed rooms that allow patients to have much-needed privacy, cameras in rooms so medical teams can make sure patients are safe, welcoming consultation areas, activity rooms, and areas where patients can meet with their families.

'We have an average of 17 patients coming into our emergency room and we don't have that capacity in our [previous] mental health unit to make sure that they are admitted,' says Dojczewska, noting that sometimes patients were transferred to different hospitals. 'A lot of times we're able to provide supports in our community, but for patients who are in crisis we can't say, 'This is your support in the community and go,' we really have to take care of them. We do have the emergent mental health assessment unit and the premise of that unit is to have a patient assessed and move to a unit within 24 hours. We're not able to do that the past several years because we did not have that capacity. Just having the rooms, the beds, the appropriate space, will be very helpful for us to help patients move from the emergency room to the unit right here.'

Provincial Health Minister Sylvia Jones, accompanied by Newmarket-Aurora MPP Dawn Gallagher Murphy, Aurora-Oak Ridges-Richmond Hill MPP Michael Parsa, King-Vaughan MPP Stephen Lecce, and Southlake leadership had a tour of the new space last week and hailed the advances in its walls.

'The new Adult Inpatient Mental Health Unit at Southlake is another example of how our government is expanding health care services closer to home,' said MPP Gallagher Murphy in a statement. 'This newly renovated space will ensure that individuals who need emergency mental health support receive the care they need, in a safe, modern, comfortable environment. Thank you to Southlake for everything you do to support our community and for helping residents on their journey to wellness.'

Added MPP Parsa: 'I am proud to celebrate the opening of Southlake Regional Health Centre's new adult mental health unit, and the role it will play in breaking down barriers for mental health care. This expansion will allow individuals in our community to get the treatment they need, when they need it - empowering them to live healthy, productive lives.'

Southlake Regional Health Centre President & CEO Arden Krystal said she was 'thrilled' to see the unit open to increase access to mental health care in the hospital's catchment area.

'Thanks to the investment from the Ontario government and the generosity of our donors, we are able to care for more patients in a space that is suited specifically for their needs,' she said.

Thanks were also given to everyone in the community who contributed to the capital campaign.

?There's always a general excitement when you open a space, but what I've observed is it is heightened with this space,? said Robinson. ?It is something that has been on the radar obviously for years and once people have had the opportunity?. It brings that level of excitement, so the staff are very much looking forward to the space.?

Added Dojczewska: ?The majority of our mental health staff have come through the space and they just want to work here. They are saying they want to come and be here every day, which is helping create a different energy, which is helping us build therapeutic relationships with our patients because if you're positive, that energy is just contagious and it is very helpful for anybody that is coming here. They are impressed with the size of the space, they're impressed with the technologies, and they are seeing that we do care about staff safety and patient safety.?

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