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ENHANCEMENTS TO HEALTH CONNECTION PUBLIC INFORMATION LINE

The Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, September 7, 2007, from the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Council approve the receipt and expenditure of a \$13,000 grant from the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario to apply towards completion of an initiative to enhance the Health Connection public information line, as described in this report.
2. Council authorize the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services to execute an agreement with the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario respecting the Advance Clinical/Practice Fellowship.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to:

- Receive approval from Council for the receipt and expenditure of \$13,000 from the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario.
- Provide an overview of the funded project, “Advancing Telepractice Leadership in Public Health: Development of a web-based service delivery model to enhance a Public Health Information Line”.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario Advanced Clinical/Practice Fellowship

The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario Advanced Clinical/Practice Fellowship is designed to provide a Registered Nurse with a self-directed learning experience to develop clinical, leadership or best practice guideline implementation skills, with support from a mentor, the organization where the Registered Nurse is employed and the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario. This initiative is aimed at developing and promoting nursing knowledge and expertise, and improving client care and outcomes within Ontario.

The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario Advanced Clinical/Practice Fellowship program is now entering its eighth year of existence. To date, 303 Fellowships have been funded to various health care facilities throughout Ontario, under funding from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. This particular Fellowship is one of the first to be granted to a Public Health Unit in Ontario.

The York Region Health Services Fellowship applicant completed an application proposal to the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario in May 2007. This proposal included a letter of intent, a learning plan and endorsement letters from both the Acting Medical Officer of Health and the Chief Nursing Officer. The Manager of Health Connection also agreed to accept the role of a mentor to the applicant throughout her fellowship. The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario approved the proposal in July 2007.

3.2 Possibility of enhancing Health Connection public health information line with web-based service delivery model

Health Connection provides confidential public health information, education, counselling and links to community resources via telephone. It operates during regular business hours, Monday through Friday, with teletypewriter (TTY) and translation services available, and pre-recorded messages after hours.

In 2006, the Health Connection staff responded to 39,626 telephone calls. During the same year, web traffic to the York Region website, www.york.ca, totalled 11,954,478 hits. This suggests that a large population could access Health Connection through a web-based service. The Internet is increasingly being used as a resource for health information, making this an optimum time to explore a web-based public health service delivery model.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Advancing Telepractice Leadership in Public Health: Development of a web-based service delivery model to enhance a Public Health Information Line

The goal of this Advanced Clinical/Practice Fellowship project is to explore the potential development of a web-based public health service delivery system to enhance our public health information line. This will be accomplished by identifying prerequisites, expected opportunities and potential challenges. A Health Connection Public Health Nurse will be seconded to manage the 12-week project. Her position will be backfilled during this time and, after the project is completed, she will return to her original position. The development and implementation of a web-based public health delivery model will be evaluated throughout this project.

This Fellowship provides an opportunity to reinforce the commitment of the Public Health Branch to continuous quality improvement, specifically in the area of telepractice.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The total project cost is estimated at \$24,684. The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario will contribute \$13,000 for the Fellowship. The remaining \$11,684 will be accommodated in the 2007 Public Health Budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

The development of a web-based public health service delivery system would increase the community's accessibility to health information and would help meet the needs of our increasingly diverse population. It would also provide an alternative for those who prefer web technology to telephone services and for residents who may have hearing impairments.

7. CONCLUSION

It is recommended that staff be authorized to receive and expend a \$13,000 Advanced Clinical/Practice Fellowship from the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario in order to explore a web-based service delivery model to enhance the telepractice currently provided by Health Connection. It is also recommended that Council authorize the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services to execute an agreement with the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario respecting the Advance Clinical/Practice Fellowship.

For more information on this report, contact Dr. Karim Kurji, Medical Officer of Health and Director of Public Health Programs, in the Public Health Branch of the Health Services Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.