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PROVINCIAL FUNDING FOR DEDICATED EMERGENCY ROOM NURSES TO ADDRESS EMS OFF-LOAD DELAYS

The Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendations contained in the following report, August 25, 2008, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. Council approve the receipt and expenditure of up to \$375,000 for the fiscal year 2008-2009 (ending March 31, 2009) to be disbursed to York Region hospitals to secure dedicated emergency room nurses aimed at reducing Emergency Medical Services off-load delays.
2. Council authorize the Commissioner of Community and Health Services to enter into the necessary Memoranda of Understanding with the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and York Region hospitals with respect to the receipt and disbursement of the funding.
3. The Commissioner of Community and Health Services report back as appropriate on the effectiveness of this initiative in addressing ambulance off-load delays in York Region.

2. PURPOSE

This report seeks Council approval for the receipt and expenditure of the one-time funding from the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC) in the amount of \$375,000 for dedicated emergency room nurses to help address Emergency Medical Services (EMS) off-load delays.

This report also seeks Council approval to enter into the necessary Memoranda of Understandings (MOUs) to implement this initiative in order to expedite the deployment of these nurses at York Region hospital emergency rooms (ERs) and maximize the use of the funding.

3. BACKGROUND

The Minister of Health and Long-Term Care notified York Region on May 29, 2008 that the Province will be providing a one-time funding increase of up to \$375,000. The funding is to be disbursed by the Region to area hospitals for acquiring dedicated nurses to receive ambulance patients in hospital emergency rooms.

This funding represents an important short-term strategy in an attempt to relieve mounting pressures placed on York Region EMS by off-load delays. The funding is 100% provincial dollars. York Region was one of a number of municipalities that received these funds. The total provincial amount for this initiative is \$4.5 million.

The goal is to assist in addressing ambulance off-load delays by having nurses available for the sole purpose of taking over patient care from EMS until the hospital ER department is ready to accept the patients. If successful, this would allow EMS resources to be more quickly re-deployed to emergency calls in the community.

Off-load delays a critical issue for EMS performance requiring a coordinated approach through MOHLTC and area hospitals

The time spent by EMS personnel in transferring patients to ER department care is a mounting issue in many jurisdictions across Ontario, including York Region.

It also significantly impacts the level of resources that York Region EMS can deploy to meet community need for services. Key factors contributing to off-load delays such as dispatch proficiency and access to ERs are responsibilities of the Province and hospitals respectively. As a result, the capacity of York Region EMS to address off-load delays alone is limited.

The issue has been highlighted in recent communications to the Health and Emergency Medical Services Committee and will be further addressed through a report to Regional Council in late 2008 on EMS response times.

4. ANALYSIS

Dedicated nurses a promising option to attempt to reduce off-load delays

York Region EMS has explored a number of options to reduce the effects of off-load delays through improved coordination of EMS resources and flow-through in transferring patient care to hospital ER departments. Results show that having a registered nurse or registered practical nurse responsible for receiving, treating, and managing ambulance-only patients in non-life threatening conditions could make a difference in reducing off-load delays while maintaining an appropriate level of care. It is estimated that one

dedicated nurse could release four to six EMS units (2 paramedics and one ambulance per unit) which would otherwise be occupied waiting to transfer patients to ER care.

New funding responds to proposals from municipal EMS providers

A number of municipal EMS providers, including York Region, have called for the use of dedicated nurses as an interim strategy to help address off-load delays while MOHLTC develops more comprehensive approaches to improve access to hospital ERs. Previous studies prepared for MOHLTC have also identified EMS dedicated nurses as a best practice, so York Region EMS sees the new funding as a welcome development.

The Region will need to enter into MOUs with MOHLTC and area hospitals to access the funding and track effectiveness

To access the funding, municipalities are required to enter into a MOU with the MOHLTC, as well as a MOU with area hospitals specifying the levels of service, logistics around use of space, and protocols for transferring patients and patient information between paramedics, the off-load nurse and hospital staff.

An important consideration will be collecting data to track the effectiveness of the initiative. Increasing off-loading times are currently being experienced in all three York Regional hospital ERs. If funding for this initiative is renewed by MOHLTC in subsequent years, allocations will be tied to measurable performance in reducing or holding the line on off-load delays.

York Region EMS is working with counterparts in other municipalities to develop a consistent approach to developing MOUs with hospitals. By providing funding through municipalities, EMS agencies will be able to ensure that additional nursing resources are dedicated to assist in reducing off-load delays and do not conflict with other hospital ER priorities for nursing staff. It is expected that hiring decisions, day-to-day staffing, and other human resource issues will be the responsibility of the hospitals subject to any terms and conditions set out in the MOU.

York Region EMS is currently in discussions with area hospitals on how best to implement this initiative and has provided the necessary proposals and information required by MOHLTC. Deploying nurses during peak off-load delay times will be a priority.

Funding is part of a bigger strategy by MOHLTC to address ER wait times

Off-load delays are symptoms of broader health system issues around ER wait times and over-crowding. The funding for dedicated nurses for EMS patients is part of a \$109 million strategy by MOHLTC to reduce ER wait times through improving their performance and by providing people with alternatives to hospital care so more hospital beds are available to admit ER patients.

While these broader system issues are beyond the responsibility of York Region EMS to address, it is recognized that successful implementation of the provincial ER Wait Time Strategy will provide a longer term solution to reduce off-load delays experienced by EMS.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

With funding provided through 100% provincial dollars, there are no financial implications associated with this report. The funding is for the 2008-2009 fiscal year (ending March 31, 2009) and will begin once the required MOUs are executed.

Once received by the Region, funding will be disbursed through a MOU with area hospitals.

If successful at reducing off-load waiting times, the Province should be encouraged to renew this funding as an interim strategy while longer-term initiatives by the Province to address ER wait times come into effect.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Initiatives to reduce off-load times will benefit residents in all local municipalities by making more EMS resources available to respond to community need for service.

Off-load delays are experienced at all three York Regional hospital ERs. The goal is to have dedicated nurses deployed in each hospital subject to available funding and agreements with hospitals on service levels and staffing requirements.

7. CONCLUSION

The MOHLTC is providing York Region with 100% provincial funding for the 2008-2009 fiscal year (ending March 31, 2009) to enable York Region hospitals to secure dedicated nurses specifically to attempt to reduce off-load delays in their ERs. This report seeks approval for the receipt and expenditure of the funding, as well as approval for the Commissioner of Community and Health Services to enter into the necessary MOUs with the MOHLTC and York Region hospitals.

York Region EMS views this funding as a positive interim strategy while MOHLTC works for a system-wide solution to reduce emergency room wait times.

For more information on this report, please contact Norm Barrette, General Manager, Emergency Medical Services at Ext. 4044 or Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, Managing Director, Strategic Service Integration and Policy Branch at Ext. 2150.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.