



**WEST HALDIMAND
GENERAL HOSPITAL**
75 Parkview Road,
Hagersville, Ontario. NOA IHO

Telephone: 905-768-3311

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West Haldimand General Hospital Announces 2010 Budget ***Core health care services will remain at West Haldimand***

Hagersville, ON; David Bird, CEO for West Haldimand General Hospital (WHGH) announced the hospital has balanced its 2010 budget with a minimal impact on staffing levels and no impact on the core services at the hospital.

Mr. Bird informed the media today that WHGH Board of Governors passed a motion to implement changes at the Hospital to balance the budget in the 2010/11 year. Specifically, part of the motion was to request the Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant (HNHB) Local Health Integration Network, (LHIN) approve closure of 10 Complex Continuing Care (CCC) beds, decreasing the total bed complement from 33 to 23. A second Board motion directed hospital management to prepare an application to the HNHB LHIN for additional beds to better serve patients who want to return to their local hospital for rehabilitation before being discharged to home with supportive community-based services.

Mr. Bird pointed out that the hospital is no different than any other in Ontario in having to make difficult but necessary changes to some of its services so that it can balance its budget. “We were asked by the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care to prepare and submit a balanced budget with the funding levels promised by the Province. The announcement today reflects what we need to do to achieve a balanced budget, assuming we receive two-percent funding,” Bird explained.

“Our board spent many hours deliberating the hospital’s operating budget and the reality is that by law we have to balance our budget. Given that wage and supply costs are outpacing our revenues from the government, our primary goal is to concentrate on providing the core programs to the people our hospital serves with the diminishing healthcare dollars we are allocated,” explained Board of Governors Chairperson Patty Nixon. David Bird pointed out that CCC beds are available at nearby hospitals and that finding ways to better provide care to Haldimand and surrounding area residents close to home remains a priority at WHGH.

“The application to close our CCC program is obviously a very difficult decision to announce,” Mr. Bird added, “but we are pleased to report that, given our current staffing levels, we will have minimal impacts on staff.”

The CEO added, “Currently almost all of our CCC beds are occupied with patients waiting for alternate levels of care and not in need of the higher cost level of care associated with these CCC beds. So, once we implement the suggested changes, some part-time employees who have been working overtime to help us fill in the gaps will be able to return to their regular hours.”

Bird explained that by the time the 10 CCC beds are proposed for closure in August 2010, there will be no patients in the hospital occupying these beds. As beds are closed after patients are discharged, no inpatients will be affected by this closure. Mr. Bird stated, “Whether at WHGH, or through another health care provider, there will be a plan in place to ensure all patients receive the appropriate level of care.”

At the Board’s recent meeting on January 25th, LHIN CEO Pat Mandy attended and commented on hospital funding. “With the current financial situation facing the province, the health sector, including hospitals will be challenged to balance budgets. Our recently released Clinical Services Plan sets the foundation for collaboration amongst all health care providers to maximize the use of limited financial resources.”

In response to the priorities set out by the LHIN in its Clinical Services Plan, Dr. Bulger, Chief of Staff at WHGH and a Family Physician in Cayuga noted, “WHGH provides essential primary care and ER services to people in a number of south western Ontario communities, making this full-service hospital an important healthcare hub. In fact, WHGH is a model of how a rural hospital can integrate and contribute to the greater health care system in our province.”

“We have been successful at the WHGH because we always looked at ways to keep costs down while ensuring the highest level of care for our patients.” Dr. Bulger added, “Today we see a great deal of potential opportunity for better use of the underutilized capacity at WHGH.”

Dr. Bulger explained that the WHGH association with Hamilton Health Science includes a WHGH/HHS Management Services Agreement that keeps administration costs down. Senior staff is shared between West Lincoln Memorial Hospital (WLMH) in Grimsby and WHGH. WHGH is also working with the LHIN to explore options that would make sense financially and improve the healthcare resources and programs for our local communities as the LHIN implements its Clinical Services Plan.

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**For more information, visit www.whgh.on.ca or contact:
David Bird, WHGH CEO -- (905) 768-3311x 1122, or David.Bird@whgh.ca**