

'At the heart of healthcare, you have people'

CEO of Hagersville, Simcoe hospitals speaks at town hall meeting

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While healthcare is always about treating patients, how that care is administered is going to get refined at two area hospitals.

In 2015, Norfolk General Hospital in Simcoe and West Haldimand General Hospital in Hagersville came together under one leadership team, headed up by Kelly Isfan, president and CEO of both hospitals.

“This partnership has really allowed us to use our resources a lot more wisely,” she said at a recent town hall meeting in Simcoe.

She said that they recently completed strategic planning for both hospitals.

“We have two hospitals, two strategic plans, and one team to bring it together,” Isfan said.

There are three main areas of improvement for NGH and WHGH: becoming a high reliability organization, improving the patient experience, and making both hospitals comfortable places for staff to work in.

“At the heart of healthcare, you have people,” Isfan said. “With becoming a high reliability organization, you want to aim for 100 per cent of the time things being done appropriately and right.”

She said that this is not something that they would be able to achieve and be done with, “but it’s something that we’re always working towards.”

Improving patient experience is centred around ensuring that not only are patients receiving care for their physical ailments, but also that staff are treating them in a friendly and courteous manner.

“Patients expect that not only are you not going to hurt me, but that you’re also going to be nice to me,” Isfan said. “Of course, we will never meet everyone’s expectations, but we do have a ways to go.”

When it comes to being good workspaces, she noted that both hospitals are old; WHGH was built in 1964, and the oldest sections of NGH were constructed in the 1950s.

There is considerable updating work that needs to be done, such as improving the HVAC system and boilers. Between both hospitals, the costs of these improvements easily run into the millions.

Isfan said that the hospitals rely heavily on grants and money donated by the community. While she praised the hospital foundations at both locations, she noted that infrastructure needs aren’t as easy to fundraise for, because “it’s about as exciting as putting winter tires on your car.”

She noted that neither NGH nor WHGH are unique in their age or their need for upgrades.

“There are a lot of older hospitals across the province. And when there is funding, we don’t get a lot of it, because we don’t have as much population growth as some other communities, like Toronto, have.”

It isn’t a completely bleak outlook, though. Last year, NGH was able to secure about \$4.2 million in funding for infrastructure updates, and WHGH received about \$2 million.

“We have about \$8 million in requests to the Ministry (of Health and Long-Term Care) for building infrastructure at Norfolk General,” Isfan said.

Besides improvements to the buildings, Isfan and her team want to improve how treatments are administered inside.

“Both hospitals have patient and family councils. In West Haldimand, we’re looking at getting some people from Six Nations and New Credit to join the council,” she said. “We will be looking at Indigenous healthcare at WHGH. Hospitals in general have a long way to go in providing healthcare for Indigenous people.”

There are plans to kick off a capital project campaign in the new year to rebuild WHGH’s emergency department, and to create more of a palliative care space. Isfan said it’s possible they might consider incorporating spaces more geared towards Indigenous healthcare, such as a room for a drum circle.

While rural-based healthcare has its unique challenges, such as wooing physicians to the area and ensuring that residents with limited transportation options can access healthcare, there are also benefits to being in a smaller community.

“People feel great ownership of their area hospital and are very supportive of it,” Isfan said.

The town hall meeting was hosted by Dan Matten, who is hoping to run under the Liberal Party’s banner in the upcoming provincial election.

“Every one of us at some point will need to make use of our healthcare system,” Matten said. “I want to do these on a semi-regular basis. I want to help people know what’s going on with healthcare.”

by Tamara Botting

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