Stevenson CEO optimistic about instantaneous COVID-19 testing

Increasing testing capacity and wait times is an important part of limiting COVID-19's spread and better understanding its impact.

The United States, Canada, and other developing countries are currently in a race to improve turn around times for testing, with the end goal of creating instantaneous technology.

With the current tests at Stevenson Memorial Hospital (SMH), results are received in roughly five days or less, but SMH President and CEO Jody Levac said on-the-spot testing isn't far away.

?I'm confident we're going to be there quickly,? he remarked, during SMH's ?COVID-19 Virtual Q&A? last Thursday, May 14.

?The technology and the desire to? surveil this virus is moving quite quickly and I think it's really good news for the public."

Individuals who access SMH's Assessment Centre, which is set up in its lower parking lot, or receive a COVID-19 test at the hospital, receive a pharyngeal swab.

"It's not the most comfortable thing but it only lasts five seconds and essentially we take a little stick and we place it gently in your nose for five seconds and we're able to test it that way,? explained Chief of Emergency Dr. Matthew Myatt.

While those tests aren't useful for immediately screening people flowing in or out of the hospital, SMH does screen for physical symptoms, and if an individual is suspected to have COVID-19, SMH will advise them on how to treat it appropriately going forward.

The Ford government announced last week that it's encouraging all Ontarians to go to assessment centres if they have even just one symptom of COVID-19.

?We've been saying that for the past month because our local assessment centres have had the capacity to be able to do that and it's very much preferable that people know their status,? noted Dr. Charles Gardner, Chief Medical Officer of Health for the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit.

Meanwhile, the Ford government has prioritized the testing of individuals in long-term care homes as they are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 related fatalities and hospitalizations.

1,389 out of 1,904 deaths in Ontario came from long-term care residents, as of press time.

Last month the province announced mandatory testing of all 70,000 Ontarians in long-term care across roughly 630 homes.

"We're really excited about this, quite honestly, because it's just one more measure we can do to try and identify early if there's COVID-19,? noted Jane Sinclair, who manages Simcoe Manor for the County.

?With COVID, if you don't have symptoms you can't see it, you can't taste it, you can't smell it, it's invisible and that's the most dangerous part,? she stressed.

Dr. Myatt, who also serves as board chair of the Alliston Family Health Teams, said SMH team has been swabbing Simcoe Manor residents to monitor infections.

To date, Simcoe Manor has had zero positive cases of COVID-19.

Collingwood Nursing Home had the first outbreak in Simcoe County with zero symptomatic residents or staff on May 13. The three infected residents were determined as positive cases through the province's universal testing at long-term care facilities.

In total, 7,800 tests are being conducted throughout Simcoe Muskoka, which is almost complete.

By Sam OdrowskiLocal Journalism Initiative Reporter