

Stevenson hosts Virtual COVID-19 Q&A for members of the public

The way services are delivered at Stevenson Memorial Hospital (SMH) has drastically changed over the past 12 weeks in response to COVID-19.

To allow the public to ask questions and learn more about what's changed at SMH since the start of the pandemic, the hospital hosted a Virtual COVID-19 Q&A last Thursday, May 14.

The hospital building was designed in 1964 and some people had questions about how it's holding up through the pandemic.

"This community deserves a new building and so does the staff? I can tell you that in the middle of this pandemic we had a flood in the basement ? we almost lost the whole building,? said Jody Levac, SMH President and CEO.

?When you come to the hospital, you'll see a number of construction trailers. We had to quickly assert ourselves in this pandemic to get infrastructure put into place because the building is so old it's failing us.?

A multimillion-dollar redevelopment campaign was launched in October of last year and Levac said there's no greater opportunity than now to stress to the Provincial government the need for the project.

"I can tell you when they designed this hospital they weren't thinking about COVID-19,? he said.

SMH continues to function and serve the community but fails to meet the modern standards for medical care, according to Levac.

"Our physicians are top notch, our nurses top notch, but the building is not top notch, and all I can say is I feel I start every community Town Hall by apologizing to people that we don't have a new hospital yet,? he said. ?We're still working on it and more to come on that in the coming weeks.?

In terms of morale among frontline workers, the public asked how the emergency services team has been holding up.

"We're doing really well right now? it's been a little bit challenging, specifically at the beginning when there was uncertainty and so much unknown,? said SMH Chief of Emergency Dr. Matthew Myatt.

?We take a lot of comfort and pride in the fact we've had zero positive staff members from the emergency department at the moment."

On the ground-level, the team is more connected than ever before, Dr. Myatt added.

?I've never heard so much laughter, seen so many smiles, and so much positivity in the department,? he said. ?We really are banding together and? we really feel grateful for the community support that we've had so far.?

From personal protective equipment donations to baked goods and positive messages on social media, the community has stood in solidarity with SMH since the start, according to Dr. Myatt.

Meanwhile, another member of the public was curious to know about the hospital's preparedness with ventilators ? the mechanical devices that help individuals with severe COVID-19 symptoms to breathe.

Some individuals are put on ventilators for upwards of 21 days while their body fights off the virus.

SMH had two ventilators when the pandemic started, but acquired four more since then, bringing its total up to six.

For the first time in SMH history, respiratory therapists have been hired to help manage intubations and respiratory illnesses.

In terms of masks and face coverings to prevent the spread of COVID-19, a member of the public was curious as to why health officials are saying they're only meant to protect others from the virus, not the mask wearer.

Dr. Myatt said this is because face masks won't stop COVID-19 from entering the body through a person's eyes, which is potential route of transmission.

"In terms of outward spread though, it does protect the person who has the virus or maybe an asymptomatic carrier from coughing it on you," he explained.

When looking at SMH's labour and delivery unit, a member of the public asked about changes due to COVID-19.

Now, when new mothers are rushed to the hospital they will find the obstetrics department has relocated from the main floor to the second level.

Levac said it's "business as normal" for obstetrics, babies are still coming in, but mothers are being asked to wear masks and measures are in place to reduce the risk of infections.

He noted that the relocation of the obstetrics department has been lauded by hospital staff.

"They quite like it up there, so that may be a new way here at Stevenson," Levac said.

SMH is also looking at creating virtual tours where future mothers or young families can view the hospital's interior online.

Looking ahead, the next virtual event for SMH will be at transformingstevenson.ca and is slated for June 18 at 3 p.m.

More details will be released in the coming weeks.

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