

Patient and Family Advisory Council Adds Tremendous Value To Patient Experience At PRH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 29, 2017

Since its formation two years ago, the Pembroke Regional Hospital's Patient and Family Advisory Council (PFAC) has made great strides in partnering with staff to provide direct input into programs and practices which affect the patient experience.

PFACs, which are a growing phenomenon internationally, are intended to promote increased understanding and respectful, effective partnerships between patients and families and staff. They examine issues through the patient lens, an approach that supports holistic, patient-centred care, an improved overall patient experience and creative, cost-effective solutions to challenges faced by the hospital.

When the PRH PFAC was launched in April 2015, it consisted of six patient/family members and four hospital representatives. Four to six meetings were held over the course of a year with a focus on quality of care and patient satisfaction.

Since then, increased requests for PFAC assistance, some of them through Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care directives have resulted in increased membership to an overall total of nine patient advisors. Of those, six sit on the Council, one is part of the Acute Mental Health Unit's Leadership Team and one has joined the Emergency Department Leadership Team. In addition, there are advisors on the Senior Friendly Hospital Team, Medical Program Leadership Team and in staff education.

Pembroke resident Shelley TerMarsch is one of those advisors who joined the Council a little over a year ago as a way of giving back to the community in her retirement.

"I have always been a strong advocate for PRH, its professionalism and its client-focused approach. Being part of the PFAC gives me more opportunity to share in its accolades and to participate in its problem solving/continuous improvement goals," Mrs. TerMarsch said.

"I've appreciated the opportunities to share my perspectives as well as bring other client experiences forward," she said, adding that she's learned a lot about the behind-the-scenes processes that occur on various levels and feels that she has been able to give a voice to patients and families while driving change.

The evolution of the Council did not come without its challenges however, said PFAC co-chair Sabine Mersmann, Vice-President of Patient Services – Seniors and Community Care. "Initially there was some uncertainty about the role the advisors were to play and how the representatives would all work together, while finding the best way to harness the valuable input they had to offer," Ms. Mersmann said.

“As we moved forward we were pleased to be able to offer this role also as an avenue for patients and family members wishing to do more with concerns they may have raised. We also found staff and regional committees looking to utilize the Council for review and input on a variety of patient-related topics.”

Additionally, advisors, through their education about hospital processes, have become knowledgeable ambassadors for PRH within the community. Results of their work and recommendations can be seen implemented in a variety of areas such as signage, website and Welcome Guide redesign, the hospital’s Accessibility and Quality Improvement plans, patient forms and other communication tools.

Kim Wolfgram-Schmidt, also from Pembroke has been a Council member since its formation. She chose to join from the perspective of a family member who had some frustrations with previous hospital experiences. “I realized this was an opportunity to be a part of change for the hospital and a voice for the people I love who are using our hospital,” Ms. Wolfgram-Schmidt said.

She noted that what was most surprising was that the hospital is aware of some of the frustrations felt by patients and are continually looking for ways to make improvements. “This completely changed my outlook on the whole process from the start as it felt like a collaborative effort – that the hospital genuinely wanted feedback and community involvement,” she said.

She added that through her experience on the Council she has gained a deeper understanding of the hospital’s inner workings leading to a better understanding of how things that appear to be simple solutions are not always the case in a highly regulated industry. She noted that she now views complaints about hospital services as additional insights into problem solving and that when she hears positive comments or compliments about something at PRH she feels like she has been part of the solution.

“I have learned so much from this group and I’ve been fortunate enough to see the impact of my efforts and the efforts of our team as they are physically translated to the hospital environment and processes. So often we feel helpless – that there is nothing we can do, and then you stumble upon an organization like this that allows people to get involved and make real changes that many others can benefit from,” Ms. Wolfgram-Schmidt said.

If you or someone you know is interested in learning more about being part of the hospital’s Patient and Family Advisory Council, please call Sabine Mersmann at (613) 732-2811, extension 6162 or contact her by email at sabine.mersmann@prh.email.

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