



Notes from the Annual General Meeting, Brighton June 18, 2019

In a time of transition for Ontario's healthcare infrastructure, The Bridge Hospice continues on its steady course of meeting ever-growing demand for end-of-life care, working to promote the value and uniqueness of rural needs, maintaining fiscal responsibility, and touching the lives of many with special care and compassion at a most difficult time.

Kerri-Anne Wilson, Director of Clinical Services & Operations, reported on a 22% increase in admissions in 2018–19 over the previous year. Since opening in 2013 through to March 31, 2019, 188 residents (patients) had been cared for at the hospice home, along with many hundreds of family members and friends.

With a maximum of three residents at any one time, The Bridge Hospice is small and intimate, and caters to the needs and preferences of a largely rural population. Wilson is ensuring that these unique needs, especially as they pertain to hospice care, are well-represented as she works collaboratively with local and regional care partners to answer the government's call for proposed Ontario Health Teams.

Greater recognition and usage of The Bridge Hospice is reflected in donations as well, which increased 22% over last year. Treasurer Gerry Hutcheon noted that as the completion of the agreement with Saint Elizabeth approaches in 2020, additional fundraising efforts will be required. Hutcheon remarked that while the hospice continues to benefit from exceptional community support, the years ahead present an ongoing challenge that will require ongoing financial support.

Board Chair Dave Burnham acknowledged the contributions of donors – individuals and community groups – whose generosity allows the hospice to continue to provide care at no charge. He also praised the priceless efforts of hospice volunteers who contribute day in, day out, and who have been at the heart of the hospice since its inception.

Several Brighton groups were recognized with Compassionate Care for Community Awards. **Jill Hutcheon** was awarded the second annual **Ken Partridge Volunteer Award** in recognition of her exceptional efforts in governance – helping The Bridge Hospice reach significant milestones.

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End-of-life care at hospices like The Bridge alleviate families of the burden of managing care at home, and ensure the dying person and their loved ones are supported and comforted throughout the final journey. Marginalized and isolated individuals who might otherwise be alone receive dignity and friendship in their last days. For the community, the availability of hospice care frees up demand for emergency and acute-care hospital beds, providing care at about one-third the cost.

Special guest speaker Dr. Sandy Buchman addressed the crowd at the conclusion of the AGM. He is president-elect of the Canadian Medical Association and has worked extensively internationally and in Toronto in hospice palliative care. He is also a doctor who does housecalls, which he considers invaluable as they allow him to see patients in their home setting, so that care and treatment can be tailored to meet the needs of the whole person.

Dr. Buchman explained a paradigm shift in the role of palliative care for people with life-limiting illnesses. The idea is that the principles of palliative care – supporting the whole person to promote better quality of life for both patients and their loved ones – are being applied earlier in the disease-treatment process, rather than just at end of life. Among the benefits are greater patient satisfaction, better pain and symptom management, less depression and anxiety, reduced caregiver burden, and reduced hospitalizations.

He also explained the growing concept of “compassionate communities”. This is a movement that views dying as a social, not medical event, and caregiving, dying and grieving as a shared community responsibility.

Dr. Buchman predicted that hospice homes will have an evermore important role in the continuum of palliative care, which extends from diagnosis, through treatment to death and bereavement. The continuum recognizes aging, death and loss as normal and universal, that care should be organized around patients and caregivers, not just services.

Following a tour of The Bridge Hospice, Dr. Buchman praised the home as the embodiment of the vision and benefits of hospice care, and a true reflection of the compassionate community that built and sustains it.

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