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MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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SMGH Emerg Ranks Well on Ministry Web Site

Wait Times in the Strathroy Emergency Department are better than the provincial averages and, in some cases, better than provincial targets, according to information just posted on the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care's (MOHLTC) Wait Time Strategy (WTS) web site.

As part of its plan to improve Emergency Department (ED) performance, the government of Ontario has set provincial targets for time spent in the ED. Emergency Departments are now being monitored by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term Care's (MOHLTC) Wait Time Strategy (WTS) and the results are being publicly reported on its web site.

"Strathroy Mayor Mel Veale and I were discussing the new public reporting requirement on the provincial ED Wait Time Strategy. We both recognize the value and vital importance of the emergency department to residents in the community, and the continuous need to strive to improve on wait times," Ineke Haan, Chair of the MHA Board of Directors, says.

The web site information is collected through a reporting system implemented in 128 hospitals across the province. The "time of waiting" indicated on the web site is the maximum time nine out of ten Ontarians spend in the ED and is measured from the time patients register or initially see a triage nurse (who assesses the level of urgency for treatment), until the time they leave the ED. This "time of waiting" includes the time spent being diagnosed and treated by a doctor or nurse. The time patients leave the ED may be when they are sent home after being treated or when they are admitted, if medically necessary.

The MOHLTC Wait Times web site shows that in the month of October, 2008 (the first month of publicly available data collected) SMGH ED saw 1920 visits. For complex conditions, the provincial target time is 8 hours, and an actual provincial average is 13.5 hours. Strathroy looks very good at 6.6 hours. For minor conditions, the provincial target is 4 hours, the average is 4.6 and the Strathroy ED is 4.3 hours.

“We have room for improvement,” Dr. Julie Copeland, Chief of Emergency Services at SMGH, says. “But our good numbers are very encouraging considering the obstacles that we overcame last year,” Dr. Copeland says, referring to the concerns that the ED would need to close last summer because of a shortage of physicians.

“We did maintain 24/7 coverage throughout last summer thanks to all our physicians who stepped in to fill the gaps in coverage,” Mike Mazza, CEO of the Middlesex Hospital Alliance (MHA), says.

“We are also grateful to Dr. Julie Copeland, our new Chief of Emergency Services at SMGH. Dr. Copeland worked tirelessly with her team, to maintain summer coverage. And, she has also actively – and successfully recruited – new emergency physicians,” Mazza says.

Dr. Copeland practices out of her office at the Southwest Middlesex Health Centre in Mt. Brydges and assumed the position of Chief of Emergency Services at Strathroy on June 1, 2008. The SMGH Emergency Department is a busy place. Last year there were 28,000 visits.

There is a provincial shortage of Emergency physicians and the MHA is not immune to it. In the past, the MHA, like many small hospitals, has relied on family practice physicians to cover all the shifts in ED – 24/7, 365 days a year. “This is changing at hospitals everywhere in Ontario,” Dr. Copeland says.

“Our recruitment strategy and the hard work of Dr. Copeland and her team have paid off,” Mazza says, “Strathroy hospital has recruited one full time emergentologist and three physicians who will provide regular part-time commitment – in addition to our existing roster of physicians who do emergency coverage.”