

Monday June 25, 2007

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MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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The Middlesex Hospital Alliance Selected for Groundbreaking Project

The Middlesex Hospital Alliance (MHA) will be participating in a demonstration project with an aim of tackling the shortage of healthcare providers in Ontario and improving timely delivery of healthcare services.

The Physician Assistant Hospital Demonstration Project is being coordinated by the Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) as one implementation of the HealthForce Ontario Strategy announced last year by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC).

Mike Mazza, CEO of MHA, says, "The OHA describes this as a 'groundbreaking project' for Ontario hospitals. We are pleased and proud that, of 56 hospitals that applied to participate in this project, we are one of the 25 sites selected."

The Physician Assistant role is being adopted in Ontario as an innovative approach to meet the demands of increasing need and improving access to quality healthcare. At the launch of Strategy, Ontario Minister of Health, George Smitherman indicated that the strategy is designed to ensure that Ontario has the right supply and mix of health care professionals, now and in the future.

As part of the Strategy, the Physician Assistant is a health care provider who will work under the supervision of a registered physician. PAs are unregulated practitioners who do not work autonomously; all work performed by the PA is delegated by a physician. PAs are also highly skilled providers that have the knowledge, skills, and experience to work as part of a physician led team in a variety of clinical settings.

In general, PAs participating in the hospital demonstration projects will have the skills and experience to deal with medical emergencies, surgeries, specialized care and everyday health care needs. Physician Assistants will help supervising physicians with

patient interviews, physical examinations, counselling patients on issues like preventive health care, and will perform certain diagnostic and therapeutic interventions. By performing these services, Physician Assistants will reduce the burden on doctors and ease strain on the current system, allowing physicians to see more patients and focus on the most complex cases.

While new to Ontario hospitals, PAs already play a vital role in the Canadian military and in health care systems around the world. Said Smitherman, "It is important to recognize that . . . we're building on successes we've observed elsewhere, and we're applying these ideas for the benefit of Ontario patients. I'm also confident that these new roles will serve as a ladder for health care providers whose skills are under-utilized – in many cases because they are new to Canada."

Suitable candidates for the position of PAs were screened by the OHA and referred to the hospitals for interview and recruitment consideration. MHA has been approved for three PAs, and all are International Medical Graduates. Interviews with these candidates will be completed in the next few weeks and the PAs will begin at the Middlesex Hospital Alliance in January, 2008.

The three MHA PAs will be working in the following clinical areas General Internal Medicine/Hospitalist; Emergency; and General Surgery. Says CEO Mazza, "As a small alliance of two hospital sites, we face challenges in ensuring appropriate healthcare providers are available in our area. This project will demonstrate the potential value of Physician Assistants in a variety of hospital settings."