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MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

***Middlesex Hospital Alliance wins regional innovation award for Meal Buddy program***

**(Strathroy, ON)** When Kim Felker, Middlesex Hospital Alliance (MHA) dietitian, read a Canadian Malnutrition Task Force report outlining that 45% of all patients admitted to hospitals are malnourished, she was compelled to act.  She consulted with her colleague Patty Allen, MHA Speech Language Pathologist, given that many patients with feeding and swallowing difficulties are at an even greater nutritional risk.  An internal study was conducted and sadly the results were consistent with the national report.  It was determined that 50% of patients admitted into hospital are classified malnourished. As a result, Mrs. Allen and Ms. Felker shared their concerns to the MHA Senior Friendly Hospital (SFH) committee, which has been established since 2016 to enable seniors in maintaining optimal health and function while they are hospitalized.  Allen and Felker proposed establishing a Meal Buddy working group, which the SFH committee wholeheartedly supported.

The Meal Buddy volunteer program was established to help patients to eat better, and to lower their risk for developing or worsening of their pre-existing malnourished status.  Many barriers to eating well can be fixed through this program such as: placing meals in better reach of the patients, opening packages and socializing.  The program has been successful in assisting with over 800 meals at the Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital site since its inception in October 2017, and has now expanded to the Four Counties Health Services site as well.  Patients, volunteers, and staff appreciate the program. “The Meal Buddy program is a great benefit for our patients who require assistance with opening containers to access their meals. These volunteers not only provide the assistance needed by some patients, they also provide welcome conversation during meal times,” says Gini Cook, RN. Garth Newton, a Meal Buddy volunteer, also agrees, and states, “It’s a great opportunity to offer some help with the little things that we often take for granted.  The program also provides more of a ‘home’ atmosphere”.

Building on its program success, the hospital Meal Buddy working group was encouraged to develop a 90-second video, which would be profiled as part of a “Moment of Innovation” competition sponsored by the Alzheimer’s Society of London-Middlesex.  As one of 20 online entries voted on by the public, 5 videos went on to a second round, which included the Meal Buddy submission.  Then, participants from healthcare organizations attending a regional Alzheimer’s conference voted on the 5 video finalists, and MHA was chosen as the winner of the entire competition. The video can be viewed online by searching “Meal Buddies at MHA” on YouTube.  “The Meal Buddy program is a great SFH initiative which has enhanced the experience of our patients while in hospital.  I congratulate the Meal Buddy team for having developed this initiative and being recognized by their peers”, says Steph Ouellet, VP Strategic Partnerships at the Middlesex Hospital Alliance and co-chair of the hospital’s SFH committee.

The hospital is looking for additional volunteers to grow the program, both within SMGH and at its partner hospital, Four Counties Health Services.  Individuals who are interested in participating can contact Meg Sattin, MHA volunteer coordinator, at (519) 245-5295 x5595.

About MHA:

The Middlesex Hospital Alliance (MHA) is comprised of two fully-accredited partner sites: Four Counties Health Services and Strathroy Middlesex General Hospital.

A progressive, team-oriented and technologically adept organization of excellence, the MHA is creating a more integrated and seamless approach to treatment by embracing and seeking out partnerships, through collaboration and investing in people. This coordinated approach helps to ensure that a high level of service is provided while reducing costs and continually enhancing quality.