

DSB modernizes area patient transfer service

By **Warren Schlote** - April 7, 2021



Patient transfer attendant Jordan Quesnel will operate one of the transfer runs alongside a personal support worker.

MANITOULIN – The Manitoulin-Sudbury District Services Board (DSB) is continuing its non-urgent patient transfer service (PTS) in the Manitoulin-Espanola-Sudbury route, featuring improved equipment and a modified staffing model that will operate similar to the existing model after the region-wide PTS proposal failed to materialize last year.

“Our ‘Plan B’ was always our three partners (Espanola General Hospital, Manitoulin Health Centre [MHC] and the DSB) working together. We’d always be happy to participate in the regional model in the future,” said DSB CAO Fern Dominelli.

DSB has run the PTS for nine years. Among other purposes, it helps get patients to Health Sciences North in Sudbury for certain services that are unavailable on-Island.

In years past the service had used retired ambulances, usually beginning when they were seven years old, which led to regular repair costs and a shorter service life.

Effective this year, DSB has set aside a three-year-old ambulance with special patient transfer service branding that works on the dedicated route.

The current upgraded vehicle (with a second to come online shortly) has a power-assisted stretcher lift to make it easier to load patients into the vehicle. It can also accommodate a second stretcher from the side, but this will remain a “lift-and-carry” operation.

A significant difference to the revamped model is a change in staffing. Soon, PTS runs will consist of a patient transfer attendant and a personal support worker (PSW) to offer care to

patients as they make the journey.

“Right now, half of the time we have to bring someone from the hospital because of various patient needs. The people that use (PTS) are, for the most part, non-urgent, but may have personal needs where they need a nurse or a PSW for help,” said Mr. Dominelli. “We finally said, ‘that’s enough, let’s do it properly.’”

Finding PSWs for the run may prove challenging. Those workers are in high demand, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the job posting has already gone out and the partners are hopeful for a quick turnaround.

MHC VP of clinical services and chief nursing officer Paula Fields said at a recent board meeting that the modified staffing model will be very helpful for the clinical team.

“Right now, when we need to send a patient for a non-urgent test, we often have to pull an RPN off of the unit, leaving us short because we often cannot backfill,” she said.

Funding contributions for the program are divided among the partners. MHC contributes roughly two-thirds of the cost as it comprises two-thirds of service usage; Espanola’s hospital adds about a third and DSB contributes for other requests, such as residents of long-term care facilities.

DSB continues to seek permanent base funding from the Ministry of Health to run the service. The ministry has offered temporary funding when the province can afford it, according to Mr. Dominelli.

“The service should be about the same but having a PSW added will be really good,” he said. “This is exciting; we’re looking forward to this.”
