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NEWS

Local ER left out of 'action' fund

Ridge Meadows Hospital is not one of the 15 hospitals that will be receiving a piece of the provincial government's \$7 million pie to improve ER service. This in spite of the fact that, according to a recent Vancouver Sun article, Ridge Meadows has some of the longest ER waiting times in the province.

The article reported that for level 2 patients - those whose life or limb may be threatened - the median waiting time at Ridge Meadows was 78 minutes. But the numbers have to be put in perspective said Simrita Johal-Virk, media relations officer with the Fraser Health Authority.

"The Vancouver Sun used numbers from a single reporting period, Feb. 24 to March 31," commented Johal-Virk, "and there were extenuating circumstances during that period."

Included in the unusual circumstances were spring break "which increases ER wait times everywhere," said Johal-Virk, and a Norwalk virus outbreak that caused Burnaby General to close 100 beds, "which also increased the numbers at Ridge Meadows."

When asked if the Fraser Health Authority is disappointed Ridge Meadows will not receive any additional funding from the ministry of Health, Johal-Virk said it was OK because the ministry decided to include and fund the 15 busiest hospital ERs in the province as part of this latest initiative.

Four hospitals that fall within the FHA will be taking part in the Ministry's action plan to improve ER service, including Abbotsford's MSA, Burnaby General, Royal Columbian, and Surrey Memorial.

Johal-Virk also wanted the community to be aware that Fraser Health has implemented several new initiatives to improve service at Ridge Meadows. Amongst the changes was moving IV therapy from ER to the medical centre because "we had patients coming to ER for daily therapy which increased traffic and caused congestion," she said.

Fraser Health has also hired two psychiatric liaison nurses to help support mental health and addiction patients and they have added 15 hours a day for dedicated triage nurses in the ER.

They have also added to their home health staff and increased the service from five to seven days a week. "This allows for assessments over the weekend," commented Johal-Virk, which lessens the Monday-



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morning load.

There are also plans to open ten new hospice beds at Ridge Meadows "the first ever at the hospital" said Johal-Virk, "and this will make a big difference." These patients currently stay in acute care "but this is not an appropriate situation- they need sensitive care." The addition of the hospice beds will free up the acute care beds for transfer patients from ER. "It's not really an ER problem, it's a patient-flow problem," added Johal-Virk.

And then there are the planned expansions. In addition to the expanded ER which should break ground this summer, there is the new extended care facility that should open this summer or fall. Both these facilities will improve patient flow which will ultimately help the ER.

Finally, Johal-Virk wanted the community to know there is a good news story to report about Ridge Meadows hospital. The Ministry of Health and all the health authorities have a 10-hour rule said Johal-Virk. This rule applies to ER patients - they are to be seen, diagnosed and admitted or released within ten hours. The goal for all hospitals is to have 80 per cent of their patients through ER in ten hours. For the most recent reporting period, February 24 to March 31, 72 per cent of Ridge Meadows patients met the 10 hour target. "One of the best records in the Fraser Health region," said Johal-Virk, "we want to make sure credit is given where credit is due - its not all bad news."

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