

COVID-19 Update

Date: Thursday, April 8, 2020
To: Everyone at HHS
From: Rob Maclsaac, President and CEO
Subject: **Our current state**

Last week, the provincial government shared sobering projections of what we could be facing in Ontario as the COVID-19 pandemic reaches its peak. This includes an anticipated surge this month in the number of confirmed cases, hospitalizations and deaths.

At Hamilton Health Sciences, we have worked hard to be ready for the expected spike in hospitalizations. Just a few weeks ago our hospitals were filled to 110 per cent capacity or more and it seemed impossible that we could create the space needed to meet the significant volumes of COVID-19 patients.

We now have extra capacity in our hospitals as a result of decreasing outpatient care, diagnostic services and non-emergency surgery, combined with moving as many non-acute patients as possible to community settings. A very sincere thank you to our many colleagues who contributed to making room at HHS.

Using planning scenarios based on local demographic information and also the experiences of countries around the world battling COVID-19, we expect to fill the beds we have and open new ones in both traditional and untraditional spaces, both inside and outside the walls of HHS. We have shared our plan for doing so with our workforce and local media. [You can view the webinar here.](#)

The province assigned HHS a target of adding 178 new acute care beds and 60 critical care beds by the end of April, and we have already exceeded that target. The worst-case scenario calls for us to add up to 1,000 beds, of which 400 would be critical care. Those numbers are big and daunting. We all hope it will not come to that. Until now, the increase of cases in the Hamilton area has grown more slowly than in the GTA, but it could change at any moment. Our philosophy is, we would rather be over-prepared than under-prepared, and we believe our community would support that approach.

As the pandemic progresses, HHS will follow the five-stage approach to escalating hospital capacity that has been laid out by Ontario Health. You can read the April 2nd [memo from Dr. Wes Stephen here](#).

On an organizational level, and on both personal and professional levels, we are all being asked to do things we've never had to do. Our success will depend on each of us taking up those challenges. Some of you may end up working in areas new to you, with unfamiliar colleagues and unexpected duties. Everyone's ability to be flexible – most particularly, front-line workers – is going to continue being key to our successful navigation of this crisis.

As Passover and Easter begin, many people would naturally be spending time with our families and friends to celebrate the holidays. This year is different. We must continue to follow physical distancing guidelines in order to contain the virus spread. There is some evidence that our sacrifices in this regard are paying off but we all must remain vigilant. I would like to wish everyone in our HHS family all the best at this time, even as we celebrate in a much more low-key way than usual. I thank you all for everything you are doing and continue to do.

Rob
