



# Hospital Improvement Plan

The case for ...

## Changing Emergency Services in Fort Erie and Port Colborne

### Be Informed

The Niagara Health System was directed to submit a Hospital Improvement Plan to our Local Health Integration Network on July 15, 2008.

The Plan makes a number of recommendations to provide quality and safe health care to Niagarans and make the best use of our resources.

We invite you to learn more about the many recommendations in the Hospital Improvement Plan, at [www.niagarahealth.on.ca](http://www.niagarahealth.on.ca). Click on the green Hospital Improvement Plan box.

Let the facts form your opinion and have your say in the 'Your Input' survey section on our website. Or, call 905-378-4647 ext. 43107.

### Quick Facts

- From April/07 to March/08 there were 19,450 visits to Douglas Memorial Hospital Site Emergency Department and 22,860 visits to Port Colborne General Site Emergency Department.
- Over 95% of those patients could have received treatment in a Prompt/Urgent Care Centre (open 14 hours a day, seven days per week).
- In about five years, it is proposed that

Submitted by Dr. William Shragge, Chief of Staff and Dr. John McAuley, Regional Chief, Emergency Medicine

There are a great many factors to be considered when a hospital considers changing the way it delivers care. The facts around the need to change and the opportunities to improve the delivery of healthcare in Fort Erie and Port Colborne tell a story of communities whose health-care needs are changing and of the practice of medicine that has become highly specialized requiring special equipment. To meet those needs, the NHS network of programs and services must also change – not immediately, but over time and with continued support of and input from our partners and our community.

Many residents of Fort Erie and Port Colborne must go to the Emergency Department for primary or non-emergent care owing to a shortage of family physicians and community walk-in clinics. They need prescription refills or a doctor's note for work. Follow-up outpatient programs are minimal or nonexistent, so patients return to the Emergency Department time and time again.

Currently, seriously-ill emergency patients are transferred to the larger Emergency



Departments at Niagara Falls, St. Catharines or Welland Hospitals to be close to diagnostic, specialist and critical care services. Often, patients are transported by ambulance directly from a home or accident scene to one of the larger centres, frequently the case with serious traffic accidents. In the case of a suspected stroke, ambulance paramedics rush patients to Greater Niagara General Site, where a specialty stroke team is on call.

### [Two Comprehensive Primary Care Centres](#)

The Hospital Improvement Plan proposes establishing a Comprehensive Primary Care Centre in each hospital in Fort Erie and Port Colborne's, which would offer new and comprehensive services with extended hours of service. This model would be a multi-disciplinary team – physicians, nurse practitioners, social workers, community care access centre providers,

physiotherapists, etc. – in an integrated centre which would better meet the health-care needs of the residents of Fort Erie and Port Colborne and surrounding communities.

The Centres would serve a large number of the patients (over 95%) who now come to the Douglas Memorial and Port Colborne Emergency Departments each year with chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes and hypertension. Because outpatient clinics to manage these chronic diseases are not available locally, there is no choice but to use the Emergency Dep't. Therefore, the NHS is recommending that we integrate a number of outpatient clinics into the proposed Comprehensive Primary Care Centres, to provide the ongoing care and services that our aging population requires, helping residents to feel better and enhancing their quality of life.

Having such substantial primary care services will not only ensure high-quality care for residents of Fort Erie and Port Colborne, but over the long term will also keep people healthier longer, as well

over ...

## Quick Facts

- Comprehensive Primary Care Centres would open at both hospitals, providing a full range of primary care and outpatient clinics.
- Health care professionals, including doctors, nurses, therapists, social workers, etc. would be located together to provide comprehensive care.
- Inpatient beds at both sites would focus on Complex Continuing Care needs, including slow-paced recovery and rehabilitation.

---

*“Emergency medicine is about providing patients with the right care at the right hospital by the right specialists.*

*This is the kind of care I would want for my family and myself.”*

Dr. John McAuley,  
NHS Regional Chief,  
Emergency Medicine

## Services in Fort Erie and Port Colborne *cont'd ...*

as provide an ideal teaching model for students assigned to family medicine as undergraduates and postgraduate family medicine trainees.

We know that change is never easy, but we also know that the status quo in healthcare is not sustainable nor is it optimal. While change can be unwelcome, it can also create opportunities to improve the delivery of healthcare and the health of the entire Niagara community. Our vision is ambitious, and we can't do it alone. As doctors and health professionals in Emergency Medicine, we truly believe that our vision will provide the residents of Fort Erie, Port Colborne, and surrounding communities with the care they need.

The reality of the 24-hour Emergency Dep'ts in Fort Erie or Port Colborne is that on the night shift from 10 p.m. to 8 a.m., there is on average less than one patient per hour coming to the department. The majority of patients coming in through the night are the less-urgent patients who could wait until the morning. Of these night shift patients, true emergency cases average less than one patient per 10-hour shift each night. Most often, these extremely-ill patients are transferred to larger hospitals in and beyond Niagara.

Despite the low number of calls during the night shift, we are required to

fully staff our Emergency Dep'ts with doctors and nurses specially trained in Emergency Medicine. Consistent with what is happening across the country, the difficulties in staffing these departments 24 hours a day on an ongoing basis are very real and are becoming more and more of a challenge due to significant physician and nurse shortages.

### Prompt/Urgent Care Centres

Our vision in Niagara proposes that the Emergency Dep'ts at Douglas Memorial Hospital Site and Port Colborne General Site transition to 14-hour Prompt/Urgent Care Centres, open seven days a week.

These Prompt/Urgent Care Centres would handle over 95% of the current load of patients being seen. St. Catharines' Prompt Care Centre currently has about 36,000 visits per year and offers timely, comprehensive care. A similar model is under consideration for Fort Erie and Port Colborne, which would provide physician coverage from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily with onsite diagnostic, laboratory and pharmacy services available.

Ambulances would be directed to one of our three large fully-equipped emergency rooms. Patients needing emergency care would continue to be cared for at the Emergency Dep'ts in

Niagara Falls and Welland. Niagara is fortunate to have comprehensive ambulance services available through Niagara Emergency Medical Services with at least one advanced-care paramedic on each ambulance. This high level of pre-hospital care is essential to ensure rapid transport to a larger Emergency Department. Upon arrival there, patients have access to MRI, CT, specialists and full operating rooms. Having the larger Emergency Dep't as the first destination for the sickest patients avoids delay in diagnosis and treatment.

The Comprehensive Primary Care Centres in Fort Erie and Port Colborne are planned to provide new primary care services in the community, with greater emphasis on preventive care and chronic disease management, helping people feel better and reducing the need for hospital admissions.

We invite you to learn more about the many recommendations in the Hospital Improvement Plan, by going to [www.niagarahealth.on.ca](http://www.niagarahealth.on.ca). We welcome the public's feedback on the vision for change we've proposed. Let the facts form your opinion and have your say in the 'Your Input' survey section on our website.