

ER LITE

Medical facilities deliver care - stat

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Health Reporter

<http://www.healthzone.ca/health/newsfeatures/article/743184--medical-facilities-deliver-care-stat>

On a recent morning, the waiting room at the Trillium Health Centre's urgent care facility in west Toronto was totally empty. This is where patients come for minor emergencies such as fractures, sprains, burns, stitches, sports injuries and all kinds of aches and pains.

Meantime, over at Trillium's emergency department in Mississauga, 12 patients were in the waiting room, biding their time until they could be treated. What likely half of these patients didn't realize was that they could have saved a lot of time taking a 10-minute drive east to the urgent care centre.

It is one of the GTA's "best kept secrets," remarks nurse Janet McCabe, clinical leader of the centre. "The public is gradually getting to know about us more and more. The secret is getting out."

Though urgent care centres have been around for years, many people don't know what they are or that they even exist.

An urgent care centre is a cross between a full-fledged hospital emergency department and a walk-in clinic. The main differences are that urgent care centres don't take life-threatening cases, they are not open 24 hours and they don't have in-patient beds to which patients can be admitted.

There are three such hospital-affiliated centres in the GTA, including the one at Trillium, just west of Sherway Gardens Shopping Centre.

As part of a strategy to reduce long waits in crowded ERs, the province has used its website and advertising campaigns to urge the public to consider urgent care centres. The Ontario health ministry lists 15 urgent care centres on the "health care options" section of its website.

Where patients who are considered low acuity typically wait five hours at Trillium's emergency department, the health centre aims to treat and assess them within 60 to 90 minutes of arrival at its urgent care centre.

Some 46 per cent of patients who visit that ER could be treated at the urgent care centre instead, says hospital spokesman Larry Roberts.

"I think people in Mississauga don't know as much about the urgent care centre because they have a history of going to that ER. I don't think they realize it's a very short drive away," he says.

Despite all the obvious advantages, urgent care centres are often borne out of controversy. The three GTA centres were once full-fledged emergency departments in hospitals that were merged during the health services restructuring of the 1990s. The closing and merging of hospitals and emergency departments, undertaken by the province as part of a rationalization of health services, inevitably sparked outrage in surrounding communities.

Trillium's urgent care centre was created in 1999. Before that, it was the emergency department of Queensway General Hospital, which had merged with Mississauga Hospital to become the Trillium Health Centre.

The GTA's two other urgent care centres were also once emergency departments – one at Women's College Hospital downtown and the other at the Branson site of North York General Hospital.

Recently, community backlashes have erupted in Fort Erie and Port Colborne where hospital emergency departments were converted to urgent care centres.

For serious emergencies, people in these communities now must travel to emergency departments at hospitals in neighbouring communities.

The Ontario Health Coalition charges that the longer drives place people at risk.

"In Niagara, the closure of the ERs and their replacement with urgent care centres is about cost-cutting without proper concern for timely and safe access to care," says Natalie Mehra, director of the coalition. "There is no safe way for people of Fort Erie to make it to another ER in a timely fashion."

While some urgent care centres are funded out of the budgets of hospitals with which they are affiliated, such as the three in the GTA, others are privately owned and operated.

Provincial New Democrats take issue with the latter category. These urgent care centres are owned by groups of physicians who bill the Ontario Health Insurance Plan for their services on a fee-for-service basis.

"On privately owned ones, the NDP has a firm position. The model of fee-for-service physicians is not one that we support. It's not a model that is conducive to best practices in primary care or urgent care," NDP health critic France Gelinias says.

The Trillium urgent care centre was renovated last year and can treat 20 patients at any one time. It has its own lab where blood tests can be analyzed and is equipped to do CT scans, ultrasounds and X-rays.

It also has two negative pressure rooms with their own ventilation systems for patients with potentially contagious conditions.

"We have full crash capabilities," says nurse Derek McNally, director of surgical and emergency health systems at Trillium, noting that the facility is also equipped with crash carts, defibrillators, cardiac drugs and intubation tubes.

The crash carts are used for patients in life-threatening situations who show up at the urgent care centre when they really should be going to the ER, McNally says. These include people suffering strokes and heart attacks.

The urgent care centre transfers about 150 such patients a month to the Mississauga emergency department.

McNally says the urgent care centre is well equipped to stabilize them before transfer. The same emergency nurses and physicians staff both the Mississauga ER and the urgent care centre, rotating between them, he notes.

Trillium is hoping to get word out about its urgent care centre over the holidays when many doctors' offices and walk-in clinics shut their doors early or close.

This is often the busiest time of the year for emergency departments, McCabe says, adding she hopes people will consider the urgent care centre as an alternative.

The Trillium urgent care centre is open seven days a week from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m.



Photo cutlines [see web link for photos]:

Janet McCabe, a nurse who runs the urgent care centre at the Trillium Health Centre, says the facility is an alternative to emergency rooms. (Tony Bock/Toronto Star Dec. 22, 2009)

Stephen Desrocher, 13, has his broken wrist treated by Trillium Health's Patricia O'Hara. (Tony Bock/Toronto Star Dec. 22, 2009)

Urgent care close by

Torstar Network in Mississauga News
Dec 28, 2009 - 10:57 AM

<http://www.mississauga.com/news/article/247402--urgent-care-close-by>



Urgent care. Janet McCabe, a nurse who runs the urgent care centre at the Trillium Health Centre, stands in one of the treatment rooms. Torstar Network

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