

HEALTH/WELLNESS—New Program Works to Provide Better Health Care for Seniors

Seniors living in nursing homes will now have access to enhanced on-site health care from highly-trained paramedics, avoiding unnecessary trips to the hospital.

Health and Wellness Minister Maureen MacDonald joined representatives from the Emergency Health Services (EHS) and Capital Health today, March 16, to launch the Extended Care Paramedic (ECP) program, an initiative under the province's Better Care Sooner Plan.

"This program is a great example of government working with partners to deliver health care differently," said Ms. MacDonald. "We want seniors to have access to the best care possible from health care teams, so their experience is as quick, safe and comfortable as possible. This is what Better Care Sooner is all about."

This Extended Care Paramedic program offers seniors much of the same care they would receive in the emergency department, delivered by highly-trained paramedics at their bedside. This improves the level of comfort for the patient, and reduces the need for non-emergency hospital transports. The program is currently available in 15 nursing homes in the Halifax Regional Municipality who fall under Capital Health.

"EHS paramedics have the education and tools necessary to help solve problems and provide solutions for our health care system," said Darrell Bardua, Extended Care Paramedicine Senior Operations Paramedic. "This program focuses on the nursing home patient and bringing more services directly to them in their home, with a variety of other benefits to the health care system, such as reducing wait times and making other paramedic units available for emergency responses in our communities."

As part of the program, extended care paramedics assess and treat residents in a teamwork environment with the help of nursing home staff, family physicians, Capital Health and EHS resources. In non-emergency situations, nursing home residents receive a plan for follow-up care at home, or transport to the hospital at a later time if required. If the patient does require emergency care, that will be provided immediately.

"EHS paramedics are an important part of our province's health care system," said Paula Poirier, Chief Operating Officer for Emergency Medical Care, the company that manages EHS ambulance operations. "Their advanced skills and abilities allow us to deliver this exceptional program to HRM nursing home residents."

The ECP program is delivered in partnership with Capital Health initiatives that are working to deliver enhanced primary care to residents in Long Term Care facilities in the Capital District Health Authority.

"By enabling physicians, facility staff, and other health care professionals like EHS Paramedics to collaborate on resident care and respond to patient needs, Capital Health is delivering on the province's commitment to provide better health care, sooner" says Dr. Barry Clarke, District Medical Director, Integrated Continuing Care, Capital Health.

Since the program's inception in February, 72 per cent of patients have been successfully assessed and treated on site at nursing homes.

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