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Clocking your ER wait

Province launches website to track ER wait times; York Central above average in serious patients' waits

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York Central Hospital ER patients with serious conditions are waiting longer to be discharged or admitted to a hospital bed than the provincial average.

According to www.ontariowaittimes.com, a site launched last week by the province, patients with complex conditions face wait times of 15.3 hours at York Central, above the provincial average of 13.5.

Though above average, the hospital's ER wait times are lower than those

at the next three emergency rooms most visited by Vaughanians: 20.8 hours at Humber River Regional Hospital, 21.5 at North York General Hospital, and 16.8 at William Osler Health Centre.

The new website includes targets for reducing the length of emergency room visits — four hours for patients with minor conditions and eight hours for those



TICK TOCK: The province wants to lower ER waits and has launched a website showing wait-time targets for Ontario's hospitals. York Central is on track for patients with minor conditions, but it'll have to shave off about 7 hours to meet the acute condition target. (Photo illustration by Shadi Raoufi)



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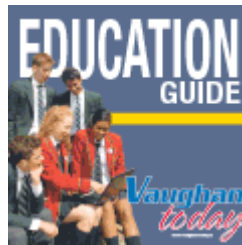
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needing more comprehensive diagnosis and treatment. It indicates York Central is already meeting the four-hour target for less acute patients with ER wait times, below the provincial average of 4.6 hours.

“I think we’re doing exceptionally well, especially given our overall situation,” Dr. Larry Grossman, York Central’s chief of staff said Tuesday. “We’re one of the few hospitals across the province and certainly in the (Central Local Health Integration Network) that has been able to meet the target for the less acute patients.

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“Given the volumes that we have, the growth that we’ve had, the shortage that we have in terms of beds, I think that’s a phenomenal achievement for our staff, and we would hope at some point to meet the target also for the more acutely ill patients.”

The wait time numbers are based on data from October and represent the amount of time nine out of 10 patients spend in an ER from registering to being discharged or admitted to a hospital bed.

The key issue faced by York Central in reducing wait times is dealing with the bottleneck caused by a shortage of beds outside the ER, Grossman said. Patients are left waiting until a spot opens up elsewhere.

Adding to the challenge are increases in both ER visits — a 10-percent jump since April — and in the severity of patients’ conditions, which the hospital has had to face with no change in the number of acute care beds available, he said.

York Central is working hard to clear the ER bottleneck, Grossman added, including re-purposing an old area of the hospital into a 15-bed temporary holding area for those in line for an inpatient bed.

“That allowed us to get them out of the emergency department, free up stretcher space in emergency and I think that’s been a huge, huge advantage,” Grossman said.

Other initiatives designed to lower wait times include working closely with community partners, including nursing homes, and expanding the hospital’s stroke prevention and urgent medical clinics, he said.

Grossman didn’t speculate how big an effect the proposed hospital in Vaughan would have on York Central’s ER wait times, saying it would depend on its location and its mandate.

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“That’s so far off in the future that I can’t really predict what impact that is going to have,” he said. “I think we’re a long way from having a separate healthcare institution in Vaughan.”

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