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Bringing the Synagogue to Patients for Rosh Hashanah

York Central Hospital (YCH) brings the synagogue to patients who are not able to attend traditional services out in the community. This year, Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, begins Wednesday, September 12 at 7:16 p.m. in the Toronto area. As in previous years, the hospital is arranging for rabbinical volunteers to visit YCH at the request of the Jewish patients and residents to celebrate the year 5768 on the Hebrew calendar.

The observance of the festival of Rosh Hashanah happens over two days beginning on the first day of the Jewish year on the anniversary of the creation of man.

On Thursday and Friday, September 13 and 14 beginning at 4:30 p.m., special guest Rabbi Mendel Bernstein of the Chabad Synagogue in Richmond Hill, along with his colleagues, will be conducting visits to all the Jewish patients, room by room over the two days. “Most of them would love to be in a synagogue. We do our best to bring the synagogue to them, to include them when they can’t always participate in the spirit of the holiday,” says Rabbi Bernstein.

Jewish Chaplain in Spiritual Care Services organizes gathering for seniors

Organizer of the Rosh Hashanah services Rabbi Lazer Danzinger, Jewish Chaplain in Spiritual Care Services at YCH says “at any given time there are about 35 patients and approximately 50 YCH staff and physicians of the Jewish faith at the hospital”.

The event is organized in conjunction with the Continuing Care Program to allow for a small gathering of patients to participate in the holiday ceremony along with the staff, he said.

Rabbi trumpets the shofar for 10 years at YCH

Rabbi Bernstein has been visiting and performing ceremonies at YCH for the past 10 years. He brings with him a shofar, a ram’s horn “designed specially for Rosh Hashanah”. A central part of the celebration is the trumpeting of the shofar to recognize

the crowning of God as King of the Jewish people. The blowing of the instrument also represents a call to repentance. It also evokes the story of Abraham and Isaac on Rosh Hashanah as described in the Book of Genesis. After Abraham showed his willingness to comply with God's will to sacrifice his son Isaac, God told him it was no longer necessary and to substitute a ram in his place.

Some Rosh Hashanah traditions

In addition to sounding the shofar in each patient's room, Rabbi Bernstein will observe other Rosh Hashanah traditions including blessings and prayers and the eating of a piece of apple dipped in honey to symbolize the desire for a happy and healthy year.

Media Contact: Cheryl Bird
Public Affairs Officer
York Central Hospital
(905) 883-1212, ext. 7493
cbird@yorkcentral.on.ca