

IN TOUCH

AN UPDATE TO OUR PARTNERS



St. Joseph's speech-pathologist Debra Medzon (left) holds a virtual therapy session with patient Robert Jenkinson (right).

Reintroduction of services



This continues to be a challenging time for our health care system. As we plan the gradual reintroduction of scheduled services, the voices of our patient and family partners are crucial to our success. A Redesign and Reintroduction Team has been established to guide St. Joseph's in this work. They will consult with our patient and family councils along the way. - Dr. Gillian Kernaghan, St. Joseph's President and CEO

St. Joseph's is planning a gradual reintroduction of scheduled services that were postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic response. Planning has been done in partnership with health service providers across the region and is based on a framework from Ontario Health.

Given we are still in a pandemic, it may be some time before we can fully open all services. Patients are being prioritized to ensure those most in need are seen first. Many patients will, unfortunately, continue to experience delays in receiving a face-to-face appointment. However, many programs and services will continue to serve patients virtually wherever possible.

"Planning has been done in partnership with health services providers across the region..."

We recognize the value of keeping connected and sharing information with our patient and family partners. After this issue, InTouch will be produced every quarter. Watch for the next issue this fall.

Reintroduction of services (cont'd)

Our reintroduction of scheduled services plan is based on several key principles including:

- ensuring our patients have equitable access to care when they need it
- protecting the safety of those we serve and our staff and physicians
- maintaining capacity at St. Joseph's to support our role within the regional health system to be able to respond to a surge in COVID-19 cases
- following the lead of Ontario Health and the province wide approach to resuming services

HOW WILL PATIENTS BE PRIORITIZED FOR CARE?

Hospitals in Ontario are using an ethical framework designed by the Ontario government to prioritize patient care. Many factors need to be considered in deciding which patients will have their procedure or appointment scheduled first. We need to understand the health status of the patient and what supports and supplies are needed to safely care for them, which will vary for each individual patient but may include:

- staff and physicians needed to provide care
- personal protective equipment
- medications
- laboratory and diagnostic imaging tests
- care for after their procedure, appointment or hospital stay. Care may be at home, provided by Home and Community Care or their family physician. Some patients may need a bed in a retirement, long-term care or group home or supported living.

Our access to the vital supplies and supports needed for safe and quality patient care change quickly in this pandemic. We appreciate the understanding of our community as we take the steps necessary to allow a safe and gradual approach to resuming scheduled services.

COVID-19 research at St. Joseph's

St. Joseph's research arm Lawson Health Research Institute has awarded more than \$202,000 to its research teams to support critical discoveries during the pandemic.

More than 14 projects ranging from improved diagnostics to understanding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on frontline health-care workers have been funded. In collaboration with Lawson, St. Joseph's Health Care Foundation announced two clinical drug trials at St. Joseph's to combat COVID-19.

Led locally by Dr. Michael Silverman, Medical Director of St. Joseph's Infectious Diseases Care Program, one trial will assess the safety and efficacy of using hydroxychloroquine to prevent COVID-19 in health care workers recently exposed to the virus. This trial will also assess the drug as a treatment for non-hospitalized patients with mild cases of the illness. St. Joseph's will be one of many participating sites in the trial, which is being led by the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre.

Dr. Silverman is also partnering with Lawson scientist Dr. Michael Borrie, a geriatrician at Parkwood Institute, on a prevention trial to test the safety and efficacy of the drug for patients and residents at Parkwood Institute who have been exposed to COVID-19. They are at a higher risk of infection, as well as serious complications and potential admission to acute care.

"We appreciate the understanding of our community as we take the steps necessary to allow a safe and gradual approach to resuming scheduled services."

Keeping everyone safe

One way to protect everyone in our buildings from COVID-19 is to ensure they are properly physically distanced (by 2 metres) when possible. To achieve this, we are redesigning our spaces such as waiting rooms and common areas, decreasing the number of patients booked for appointments at the same time and installing barriers. Virtual care options will also be used to limit the number of people in our buildings.

All those coming to St. Joseph's for an appointment or to visit, will be screened at the entrance to our building for COVID-19. Our website (www.sjhc.london.on.ca) has the latest information on what entrance to use.

Masks are provided at the door and everyone is asked to clean their hands. Patients will be notified of when their procedure or appointment will be rescheduled. We are asking that they do not contact the hospital about a postponed appointment or surgery, unless their condition has changed.

It's very important that patients attend their scheduled appointments. Our facilities are safe to enter. Stringent safety practices are in place to protect everyone.

Online caregiver-support tool

A new online support tool for caregivers in southwestern Ontario, developed by the COVID-19 Community South West Region Pandemic Planning Table, has launched.

After weeks of consultation health-service providers, caregivers and patients the new tool provides caregivers throughout Huron-Perth, Bruce-Grey, London-Middlesex, Oxford and St. Thomas-Elgin with critical information about caring for their loved ones and themselves during the pandemic. The tool can also connect them with local service providers offering additional information and guidance if needed.

The one stop shop includes vital resources and information on finances, mental health, abuse, and social distancing for caregivers – plus much more. Learn more at <http://www.cssontario.ca/covid-19>.

Fake websites and patient portals

There have been recent reports of fake websites looking for patients to input their information. Just like phishing emails or text messages, scammers also use websites that mimic legitimate sites to encourage you to share your contact and personal information. The only patient portals supported by St. Joseph's Health Care London are MyChart™ (<https://www.mychart.ca/>) and PocketHealth (<https://stjosephs.mypockethealth.com/request>). Any other sites claiming to be patient portals of St. Joseph's are fake.

An update on the successes of virtual patient care

As previously reported, teams across St. Joseph's are rapidly and creatively taking advantage of what they see as the COVID-19 silver lining – virtual and remote patient care.

In April 2020, 50-60 percent of all registered visits at St. Joseph's were virtual, a staggering jump from about five per cent pre-pandemic. The daily average is currently about 1,000 virtual visits compared to about 200 a day pre-pandemic. For a fulsome story on this work, as well as numerous highlights of how programs and clinics are providing virtual care, visit St. Joseph's website <https://www.sjhc.london.on.ca/our-stories/virtual-patient-care-%E2%80%93-covid-19-silver-lining>.

“Virtual patient care is an opportunity to connect with and support patients and involve family caregivers.”

VIRTUAL CARE MAY NOT BE FOR EVERYONE

While virtual care is burgeoning as an additional tool at the disposal of clinicians, it will not be a replacement for all instances of face-to-face care and our teams are working to ensure it's used when appropriate.

From the cover – a patient story

When 77-year-old Robert Jenkinson began his virtual care sessions with St. Joseph's speech-pathologist Debra Medzon, he couldn't speak. After suffering from a stroke in early March 2020, a faint whisper – almost inaudible – was the extent of his verbal communication.

Robert spent weeks receiving treatment as an inpatient at St. Joseph's Stroke/Neurological Rehabilitation Program and was discharged to St. Joseph's Community Stroke Rehabilitation Team – due to the evolving pandemic. “It was a stressful time,” says Janet Jenkinson, Robert's wife of 52 years and his primary caregiver.

“When we heard about the opportunity for virtual care therapy sessions, we were grateful that someone had reached out to us.” Thanks to virtual therapy, Robert is now speaking clearly and in full sentences. “Getting someone who has no voice, back into their voice is a career highlight every time it happens,” says Debra.

“It's been a virtual lifeline,” says Janet. “If I was the sole caregiver to help Robert with his speech, the outcome may have been quite different. We are very grateful.”