

Building Caring Relationships

March 31, 2017

Dear Northerners,

Health care shouldn't have walls. Providing services to help people live healthy and well in the setting of their choice relies on building partnerships among health care professionals, administrators, municipal leaders, police services, educators, and housing.

As a member of the Province's Mental Health and Addiction Leadership Council, I have the opportunity of sitting at a table with some of Ontario's brightest leaders and advocates of mental wellness. Chaired by Susan Pigott, who has had a remarkable 35-year career in leadership roles and a decade in the trenches as a nurse in emergency medicine and mental health, Council members truly understand that it takes a community of partners to make a difference and to collectively understand that wellness requires a holistic approach.

The Leadership Council takes a holistic approach by listening to patients and their caregivers to help find solutions. Partners share ownership and responsibility to care for people who live in many of Ontario's community. We need to wrap care plans around people to address the inequities that may be impacting their health. Sometimes this includes unlikely partners or people you wouldn't ordinarily think about as health care, but we are doing it. And it's working.

The World Health Organization defines the social determinants of health as "the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age." If people don't have a roof over their head, food on the table, a job with safe working conditions or an income, and a social network to support them, how can they possibly be healthy? Agencies and governments around the globe recognize that a person needs more than health care services to be well. Many Indigenous people use the four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel to assess whether a person is healthy: physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental health. I personally find much value in this approach and how it relates to a sound, holistic journey to wellness.

I recently had a conversation with Linda – a fellow Northerner who loves her brother dearly and wanted to ensure he would continue to have a place to call home. Due to his physical and



mental challenges, this man needs a network of support to live safe and well in community. So the LHIN called 20 community leaders together, including Linda, to help find a solution. As I write, we are finalizing discussions with partners to make this solution work, ensuring Linda's brother and others like him live healthy and well in their setting of choice for as long as they are able.

As a LHIN, we work with many partners outside the typical health care field – like police for instance. In fact, a few years ago the Greater Sudbury Police Service and more recently the Sault Ste. Marie Police Services recognized the North East LHIN with a community award for the work we have done to strengthen mental health and crisis care in the city while improving access and coordination of services for residents living in marginalized areas of the Sault. Our work to fund a mobile crisis model was also recognized. This model includes a crisis worker from the Sault Area Hospital who is available on peak hours to accompany police officers. This has led to more people being connected to mental health services and 34% fewer apprehensions under the Mental Health Act.

In North Bay, we recently participated in a meeting with a remarkable community agency, The Hands, who brought together people from mental health and school boards with physicians and others who sat around a small boardroom and talked for two hours about how better to serve youth in crisis. All in attendance recognized that this social challenge of better meeting the needs of struggling youth, was not one that could be solved by one organization – it will take many partners to deliver quality services to keep our younger population healthy and well.

Increasingly, we will see patients themselves, and their family members and caregivers, sitting around these advisory tables with other community partners. That's patient-centred care and valuable knowledge at the table -- all working to strengthen the full continuum of care for fellow Northerners.

Louise