



COMMUNICATION UPDATE

TO:	Mayor and Members City Council
DATE:	December 17, 2021
SUBJECT:	Paramedic Service Pressures and Media Briefing (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
SUBMITTED BY:	Michael Sanderson Chief, Paramedic Service Health and Safe Communities
SIGNATURE:	

This report is to make Mayor and Council aware of two issues - episodic challenges faced by the Paramedic Service in ensuring all ambulances are fully staffed and efforts that will be undertaken to educate the public on when it is appropriate to call an ambulance.

With respect to staffing challenges our paramedics, like all other health care providers, have been rising to the challenges of increasing demand, the risks of COVID, wearing of personal protective equipment, cleaning requirements, and of course the increasing offload delay challenges. They have also been accepting extra responsibilities and tasks such as supporting COVID Immunization clinics, COVID testing, homebound immunization, remote patient monitoring, and a variety of other aspects all succeeding in the drive to reduce stress on the broader health care system. Having been at it for the last 21 months now they are tired, many to the point of exhaustion. They are stressed, some to the point of cumulative mental health challenges. And they are anxious knowing that the pressures we are under are likely to continue for at least the foreseeable future.

Despite having hired 49 new staff this year, with many of these filling gaps created by retirements, job changes, long term disability, and WSIB, we have continued to have a high reliance on overtime to ensure shifts are covered. This month alone our scheduling staff have made over 17,000 calls to cover shifts and for the most part they have been successful. There are days however where we have been less successful and last night was an example of this. With a lot of shifting, moving staff from community support activities, having supervisors staff ambulances on overtime overnight, and extending shift overtime we were able to cover 16 of the 21 normally staffed ambulances. As result there were no incidents and adverse outcomes were averted.

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

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On a call with my provincial peers yesterday it was quickly apparent that every large service in the province, and many smaller ones, are facing exactly the same issues. We discussed strategies and shared ideas but it is clear that the toll on paramedics is having a province wide impact. We anticipate as this fourth wave of the pandemic progresses we will continue to face periodic staffing challenges, particularly over the holiday season, and will do all that we can to resolve the issues including reallocation of staff from community support activities to front line operations. There may however be impacts on response time performance where we are simply unable to staff sufficient ambulances to meet call demand and have to rely on neighbouring services to support us.

On the second issue, public awareness, we continue to be faced with increasing requests for service which of course contributes to the strain and stress our paramedics are experiencing. We are currently averaging 266 responses per day, about 28 more per day than pre-pandemic and 43 a day more than we experienced for the first 4 months of the year.

Our experience is that while the majority of calls are appropriate requests for ambulance response there are some that are better managed through access to other resources such as the Province of Ontario Telehealth system, visits to Urgent Care or Walk-in Clinics, or accessing a primary care physician. Our hope is that by educating the public through an awareness campaign that better choices may be made and some of the response pressures will be reduced.

To that end I have been working with Communications to develop an awareness strategy and we will be holding a media briefing this afternoon to discuss the issue. Following the media briefing a media release will be issued.

The approach will make clear that when a citizen calls for an ambulance an ambulance will respond. Our paramedics will be there for the emergency needs of our community and we need the community's assistance to make sure ambulances are not responding to calls where they are not required. In that way our paramedics will be more available for a timely response to true emergencies. Examples of a true emergency are outlined below:

- Appears to be having a stroke (think **F-A-S-T**: Facial droop, Arm weakness, Speech difficulty, Time to call 911)
- Appears to be having a heart attack
- Has lost consciousness, is unresponsive, or is not responding appropriately
- Is having a seizure
- Is having shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Is bleeding uncontrollably
- Is having a severe allergic reaction

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- Has severe burns
- Has swallowed something poisonous
- Has thoughts of harming themselves or others
- Has taken too much medication on purpose or by accident, including drug misuse or abuse

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

None