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WGH joins collaborative to enhance care for seniors

Whitehorse – Whitehorse General Hospital (WGH) will be part of a new initiative to improve health care for seniors. The WGH team was selected as one of 18 national and international organizations to join the Acute Care for Elders (ACE) collaborative.

“This is incredible news for Yukon seniors and their families,” said Geoff Zaparinuk, WGH’s Director of Patient Care. “Being a part of this group will help us to continue to focus on creating the best patient experience by adapting our practices to better meet the specialized health needs of an aging population.”

Zaparinuk noted, as part of the ACE collaborative, the hospital’s team – including nurses, therapists, social workers, pharmacists and dietitians – will have access to expert coaches, educational materials and tools to support elder-friendly care. “This will allow us to successfully implement practices that benefit our oldest patients right here, at home.”

Today, about 16% of Canada’s population is 65 or older, but represents 42% of hospitalizations and 58% of all hospital days across the country. Yukon sees a similar demographic and hospital utilization trends. In fact, as many as 40% of WGH beds are occupied at any given time by elderly patients who may also require an alternate level of care. The number of older Yukoners is only expected to increase in the coming years.

Jason Bilsky, Yukon Hospitals’ CEO noted the significance of WGH’s participation in this initiative. “This is about being involved in collaborative care on a national – and international – scale to help us meet real, immediate and on-going needs in our community,” he said. “We are always looking at how we can improve care, health outcomes and coordination of services. ACE has been proven to work and will be an invaluable resource to implement, evaluate and spread elderly friendly practices throughout all areas of our hospital.”

The ACE collaborative is adapted from a strategy pioneered by Toronto’s Mount Sinai Hospital. This hospital was able to improve health outcomes, reduce length of stays, lower readmission rates and increase patient satisfaction. These results were achieved even though the number of patients over the age of 65 continued to grow.

WGH will receive \$40,000 in funding to participate in the collaborative over the next year. The ACE collaborative is a partnership of the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement and Canadian Frailty Network.

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Backgrounder

- Canada faces a major demographic shift in the coming decades as the number of people aged 65 years and older is expected to double in the next 20 years.
- The health challenge facing older seniors is more acute, with over one million Canadians now medically frail – a common, yet under-recognized health state where older patients experience chronic illness, multiple health problems and poorer health outcomes.
- Canada's current hospital model was developed years ago when the average Canadian was 27 years old and most adults tended not to live past age 65. Today, the increasing frequency of older adults presenting with medically-frail conditions challenges traditional models of care developed to treat patients with acute or episodic issues.
- The ACE Collaborative is based on the Mount Sinai ACE Strategy led by Dr. Samir Sinha, director of geriatrics for the Sinai Health System (Toronto) and a respected clinician and researcher
- Seventeen health care organizations from Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Yukon have been selected to participate in the ACE collaborative along with an international team based in Iceland.
- These participating teams will have an opportunity to learn the following best practices:
 - Tools to help emergency department staff and others identify and address the needs of high risk older adults.
 - Deployment of specially trained geriatric nurses and volunteers who have dedicated training in addressing the needs of frail older adults in a variety of settings.

- Unique elder-friendly protocols to better address common care issues like mobility, pain management, constipation, delirium prevention and management, and falls prevention.
 - Staff education at every level to promote expertise in caring for older adults and an elder-friendly culture.
 - Hospital units and spaces physically adapted to promote mobility and to minimize disorientation.
 - Developing a variety of care transition initiatives, including virtual and actual home visits to ensure patients are more likely to return home and better able to access care in their own homes.
- By spreading best practices across provincial and territorial boundaries, we can ensure that older adults receive the care they need, while also controlling costs, directing resources to the right places, and providing for the long-term sustainability of our publicly funded healthcare system.
 - More information about the collaborative and participating teams is available at www.cfhi-fcass.ca/WhatWeDo/ace/teams.