

January 23, 2025

Mayor Wayne Redekop
The Corporation of the Town of Fort Erie
1 Municipal Centre Drive
Fort Erie, ON L2A 2S6

RE: Niagara Health Questions, December 13, 2024

Dear Mayor Redekop,

Thank you for sharing the resolution passed by the Council of the Town of Fort Erie in October 2024. We want to acknowledge your commitment to ensuring Fort Erie residents have access to health services, and appreciate your ongoing advocacy to support funding for the South Niagara Hospital (SNH).

We understand that the formation of Niagara Health System in the early 2000s, and the evolution of Douglas Memorial Hospital to an Urgent Care Centre more than a decade ago, was disappointing to the community and left a profound sense of loss. We recognize the importance of retaining health services in Fort Erie and continue to share this commitment with you and Council.

Fort Erie primary care physician capacity currently excludes up to 11,834 residents (33% of the Fort Erie population). The evidence and research are clear that healthy communities are built around strong primary care services. To this end, we would be happy to discuss the transition of the urgent care services to the municipality in advance of the opening of the new hospital in 2028.

As you are aware, we have actively worked with the Niagara Ontario Health Team to support improved primary care in Fort Erie, and Port Colborne, through the development of interdisciplinary care teams to ensure the seamless transition of the UCCs. We have also supported the recent submission to Ontario Health, developed by local physicians, which outlines a primary care model to meet the needs of our residents. Our Chief of Primary Care has also been actively engaged in these discussions.

Niagara Health has worked closely with the Town to bolster your family physician recruitment efforts. We are committed to continuing to support Fort Erie in its efforts to attract more family doctors, as we know that enhancing primary care in Fort Erie will improve healthcare options for residents, reduce the need for episodic care, and help people better manage their chronic conditions.

In addition, we have written a letter of support for expanding diagnostic imaging in Fort Erie, as we recognize the need to maintain those services in the community. Primary care and diagnostic imaging are the first steps to ensuring access to appropriate care for residents. After the SNH site opens in 2028, the location of primary care and diagnostic imaging services will be the decision of the municipality and local providers. Like other municipalities, NH will provide Fort Erie the first opportunity to purchase or lease the Fort Erie site in exchange for its financial support for the SNH local share.

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As a hospital system, NH is bound by legislation and various regulatory requirements and cannot commit to the transition of hospital-based services such as complex care beds. At a time when hospitals are facing unprecedented health human resources shortages, and there are increasing demands for hospital services, NH will continue to work with all municipalities across Niagara to ensure all residents have access to emergency and acute care services when they need them.

Finally, please find attached the answers to the Fort Erie-related questions you submitted. As previously noted, our teams are under immense pressure and at this time, this is the readily available data.

We look forward to your presentation at the January Board meeting and the follow up meeting slated for early February. We are optimistic that we can have a productive dialogue that serves the best interests of patients.

Sincerely,



Lynn Guerriero
President and CEO

Questions and Responses:

How many patients have been seen at the Douglas Memorial Urgent Care Centre since July 1, 2023 (by the hour, week and month)?

- *From July 2023 to October 2024, the Fort Erie Urgent Care Centre has had a total of 19,612 visits. On average, the Fort Erie Urgent Care Centre receives 1,226 monthly visits.*

How many of those patients are residents of Fort Erie or other parts of Niagara Region?

- *From July 2024 to October 2024, of the 19,612 visits, Fort Erie area residents accounted for 14,987 of the visits (76.42%).*

How many of those patients were referred to an Emergency Department after presentation at the UCC?

- *From July 2024 to October 2024, of the 19,612 visits, less than 4% of visits were transferred to an acute care site.*

How many patients were referred from an ED in Niagara to the DM UCC after triage?

- *Zero (0). Niagara Health does not transfer patients to the Urgent Care Centres. An Urgent Care Centre is not an alternative to emergency care.*

How many of those patients were transported to an ED by Niagara Emergency Medical Services?

- *From July 2024 to October 2024, of the 19,612 visits, 207 visits were transferred by Niagara EMS (1.05%).*

What has been the average time for check-in, triage, examination and clearance of patients at the DM UCC since July 1, 2023 (daily and monthly basis)?

- *From July 2024 to October 2024, the average monthly length of stay from triage to physician initial assessment was 1.2 hours at the Fort Erie Site Urgent Care Centre.*
- *From July 2024 to October 2024, the average monthly length of stay from physician initial assessment to leaving the UCC was 0.7 hours at the Fort Erie Site Urgent Care Centre.*
- *From July 2024 to October 2024, the average monthly length of stay from triage to the patient leaving the UCC was 1.9 hours at the Fort Erie Site Urgent Care Centre.*

What is the number of physicians/nurses/support staff at DM UCC on a daily basis since July 1, 2023? Is there a minimum staffing requirement for day/night shift at DM UCC?

- *One-two physicians are required daily (two if splitting a shift), to care for patients in the Fort Erie Urgent Care Centre.*

- *Two Registered Nurses and one Registered Practical Nurse are regularly scheduled for the Urgent Care from 10:00-22:00.*

What is the number of physicians/nurses/support staff at DM for the chronic and palliative care beds on a daily basis since July 1, 2023?

- *The medical model for complex care (which includes palliative care/end of life) is one full-time Nurse Practitioner working Monday through Friday with physician support 7 days per week and on call.*
- *There is a charge nurse 7 days per week from 0700-1900.*
- *The staffing ratios for complex care nurse-to-patient are 1:8 on Days and 1:10 on Nights. With the change of UCC hours in July 2023, Niagara Health added an extra Registered Nurse on night shifts. We also have Personal Support Worker support from 0700-2300.*

What diagnostic services have been provided to patients at DM since July 2023 (number on a daily basis)?

- *From July 2024 to October 2024, the total number of medical imaging services have been provided:*
 - *Cardio (EGG, Holter Monitor): 1,454*
 - *Respiratory (Spirometry): 113*
 - *Ultrasound: 4,099*
 - *X-Ray: 16,493*

How many shifts have Fort Erie recruited physicians taken at the DM UCC since January 1, 2024 (specific dates)?

- *NH reached out to Fort Erie Primary Care Providers with all relevant information for support for Fort Erie Urgent Care Centre shifts. There has been no response or expression of interest. No additional primary care providers have taken shifts at the Fort Erie Complex and Urgent Care Centre.*

What efforts has Niagara Health taken to engage or enroll new family physicians for the DM UCC since July 1, 2023?

- *Niagara Health does not recruit for specific sites for the Emergency Department and Urgent Care Centre; we recruit for a full system. We continue to recruit for the Department of Emergency Medicine and Family Medicine.*

Since July 1, 2023, how frequently have any ED's or UCC's in Niagara been understaffed (dates and locations)?

- *Fort Erie UCC has faced temporary closures several times in 2024 due to the lack of physician staffing, and the shifts were filled by the emergency medicine physicians who are also Emergency Department Leaders in order to keep them open for the community. Niagara Health has repeatedly reached out to community primary care providers for support and gained limited assistance for filling shifts in both UCCs.*

What is the monthly cost to operate all services currently being provided at DM, broken down by UCC, chronic care beds, palliative care beds and diagnostics?

- *To operate the Fort Erie Complex and Urgent Care Centre, which includes but is not limited to, complex care beds, registration, medical imaging, health records, housekeeping, health records, logistics, maintenance, security, plant operations, food services, pharmacy, lab, urgent care, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech pathology, clinical nutrition, etc. is approximately \$903,000 a month. This does not include centralized corporate services such as executive leadership, finance, information technology, etc.*

What was Niagara Health's parking revenue each month since July 1, 2023?

- *From July 2023 to October 2024, Niagara Health has made a total of \$63,386 in revenue from the Fort Erie Site to support parking maintenance, capital equipment purchases and hospital operations.*

What capital works have been undertaken, when and the cost of same since January 1, 2020?

- *From January 2020 to October 2024, Niagara Health has invested \$993,799.62 into capital works projects at the Fort Erie Complex and Urgent Care Centre.*