



## Outdoor Fun Brings More Individuals to Emergency Department / May 2011

The May long weekend represents outdoor fun and, for many, the long awaited return to cottage country. Not surprisingly, the May long weekend and the upcoming summer months also signal a sharp increase in visits to the Emergency Department.

Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is home to two 24-hour Emergency Departments – one at South Muskoka Memorial Hospital (SMMH) in Bracebridge and the other at Huntsville District Memorial Hospital (HDMH). Commencing May 24 through to mid October these hospitals will see a 15 to 20 per cent increase in patient visits – an additional 15 to 25 extra patients each day. Annually, the professionals working at Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare's Emergency Department's treat approximately 45,000 patients – averaging 123 patients each day and over 200 on busy summer days.

“Our volumes start to increase in the late spring with the return of the snowbirds but we see the most marked increase during the summer months,” said Dr. Anthony Shearing, Medical Director of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare's Emergency Departments. “We tend to see an increase in injuries resulting from motor vehicle accidents, drowning, bike crashes, all terrain vehicle crashes and other accidents.”

“Applying some common sense precautions could reduce many of these accidents,” added Dr. Shearing. “Drinking responsibly and using safety equipment such as seat belts, helmets and personal floatation devices, to name a few, will help prevent visits to the emergency room.”

Worth noting, “The majority of all terrain vehicle and water sport accidents seen in our Emergency Department are related to alcohol consumption or operator carelessness,” said Dr. Steven Herr, Emergency Department Lead at the Huntsville District Memorial Hospital site. “Drinking and driving any vehicle, no matter how small, is a serious risk. Additionally, many do not consider the benefits of helmets. Wearing a helmet during water sports, particularly tubing, can help prevent serious injury.”

With the increase in visits to the Emergency Department over the summer month's one can only imagine an increase in wait times and related challenges. “That's why we've [Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare] been working diligently for the past five months to improve internal system processes within our Emergency Department(s) and it's paying off,” said Dr. Herr. “Huntsville District Memorial Hospital site of Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is number one out of 71 Ontario hospitals with respect to wait times for an initial physician assessment.”

Strategies employed to achieve this ranking include the implementation of a fast track model designed to reduce the wait time from arrival at emergency, to seeing a physician, right through to discharge.

“While our Emergency Room service has improved tremendously over the past few months, the influx of patients we anticipate seeing during peak months always poses a major challenge for both hospitals,” added Dr. Shearing.

In preparation, Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare will be hiring summer students to assist with non-nursing and support tasks; increasing nursing staff and hours. “Although it is always a challenge to handle the increased patient volumes, these steps will assist our Emergency Department staff to minimize wait times and maintain patient satisfaction during the summer months,” said Dr. Shearing.

During the summer months, Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare is encouraging patients to access the healthcare system at the most appropriate level of care. Patients with serious conditions are asked to visit their local Emergency Department while patients with less urgent needs are urged to access an alternate level of care, such as the care offered at one of two walk-in clinics. The locations of these clinics are as follows:

Huntsville Professional Medical Building at 348 Muskoka Road, North Suite 104 in Huntsville - Call 705-789-2355 for hours of operation. Starting on July 1.

South Muskoka Medical Centre and Walk-In Clinic at 230 Manitoba Street in Bracebridge - Call 705-646-7634 for hours of operation.

Prior to arriving at the nearest Emergency Department or walk-in clinic the professionals at Muskoka Algonquin Healthcare suggest applying ice to injured ankles, knees, elbows etc; cleaning any breaks to the skin with soap and clean water; applying compression to stop bleeding.

The summer months are few. Take care and be mindful of safety this season.

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