

# Patients give health services rave review

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*Editor*

They've been given thank-you cards, boxes of chocolates and bouquets of flowers from hundreds of people who have benefited from their care.

And now, the staff at Haliburton Highlands Health Services has been given one of the biggest accolades of all: top marks in patient satisfaction among all hospitals in Ontario.

The Ontario Hospital Association has just released its Hospital Report 2006 for acute care. HHHS is one of only two hospitals in the province which gets top marks in two of four categories; no hospital got top marks in three categories.

As well as being ranked first in patient satisfaction, HHHS also comes out on top of financial performance.

"It begins with the lowest person on the totem pole and works up to the CEO," Dr. Robert Heyes says when asked why HHHS has earned such a prestigious distinction. "It's the team. The food, the cleanliness, the feeling patients get – do they really count? I know our hospital shines at that.

"I think there is something special about this place. Our mission statement is 'Excellence in all we do' and that filters down to all departments. I think it's hard work and treating others as you want to be treated yourself."

He laughs when he says he can't comment on why HHHS

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# Happy staff make happy patients at local hospitals

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is also being singled out for its fiscal management. "Docs, we're the big spenders."

Deb Watson, the new manager of patient care services, spreads the credit among all the staff. "It's the people inside," she says. "They're wonderful at what they do."

"People who come here leave happier because of the people they come in contact with."

The study, done in conjunction with the Ministry of Health, is not to be seen as a report card. Instead, hospitals are to use it to identify areas of strength and weakness. The base data is from 2004 and the study is on acute care only, not long-term care.

For instance, while no other hospital in the study (which encompasses 95 per cent of all hospital encounters) gets a higher rating in patient satisfaction, HHHS falls well behind the provincial average in system integration and change.

Four things were taken into consideration for patient satisfaction:

- overall impression: includes quality of care and services and confidence in doctors and nurses
- communication: the amount and quality of information they and their families received about their condition, treatment and preparation for discharge
- consideration: were they treated with respect, dignity and courtesy? And
- responsiveness: assessment of whether they got the treatment they needed and how co-ordinated and integrated the care was.

HHHS was the only hospital to get a mark of 94; the provincial average was 85.1.

Although her departments weren't part of the study, Shannon Staley, HHHS's assistant director of care for Highland Wood and Hyland Crest, is well aware of the qualities that earned the local staff such attribution. She's worked in urban and rural settings and says there's a lot of talent that exists within the walls of HHHS.

"People here want to do things well," she says. "They truly want to do a good job."

Just as local doctors are part of a university program to train family physicians, the nurses are also involved with nursing schools, with older nurses acting as a preceptor during the student's clinical time. There are cur-



CASEY LESSARD/ECHO

Dr. Norm Bottum is one of the medical team members who give Haliburton Highlands Health Services a good reputation. Here, Dr. Bottum meets with Andrea Burk and baby Isabel Hill, one of the few babies born at HHHS each year.

Patients filling out a survey have put HHHS on the top of the list of hospitals in Ontario when it comes to their overall satisfaction. HHHS also got top marks for its financial management of local health services.

rently two student nurses at HHHS.

Watson says, "Nurses who have been here for a long time are good mentors."

And while the pressures of needing to provide a high volume of care with limited resources can also be found at HHHS, especially in the summer, patients who come into emergency do not face inordinately long wait times.

Keith Sansford, the CEO of HHHS, says he recently accompanied a friend to an emergency department in Toronto. They waited six hours for care. It would be rare for a patient to wait two or three hours at HHHS.

Sansford is deeply proud of HHHS's marks in the

report. "This is a major accomplishment for an organization such as ours," he says. "I think it comes right down to the excellent people we have working here. The staff's focus is on quality service, empathy, and compassion for the people they care for."

At the organization's recent annual general meeting, the auditor gave the corporation a glowing assessment. It has enhanced services while coming in with a budget that balances patient needs with the financial resources provided to address those needs.

The Ontario Hospital Association report also looks at such things as debt servicing, how much a hospital spends on equipment, administrative costs, sick time and how many hours nurses are directly involved with patients.