



Charity CHIPS in to help long term patients at Bridgepoint Health

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A new partnership between Bridgepoint Health and CHIP Charitable Services will help dozens of long-term patients stay better connected with their loved ones.

An acronym for Communities Helping Individual Patients, CHIP is a Mississauga-based charity created in honour of James Joseph Dinneen.

On Dec. 9, 2002, the then 30-year-old married father of two was diagnosed with acute myeloid leukemia. He'd spend the next 11 months in and out of Princess Margaret Hospital fighting his illness. Dinneen lost his battle with cancer on Oct. 28, 2003.

His good friend Jean-Pierre Laporte, one of CHIP's co-founders and a director, explained one of the little-known aspects of staying in hospital for any length of time is the Ontario Health Insurance Plan doesn't fund television, phone and computer/Internet access for hospital patients.

For that reason, Dinneen's loved ones decided to create a charitable organization that would help other long-term patients, especially those fighting devastating illnesses, stay in touch with their friends and family members when their own funds have been depleted due to extended hospital stays.

Incorporated in September 2004, CHIP was granted charitable status in August 2006. Since then it has partnered with 12 other organizations and health-care facilities across the Golden Horseshoe to provide patients with much-appreciated 'social capital', Laporte said.

"Patients need their support network," he said.

One of the perks of the program, Laporte said, is health-care providers who work directly with patients assess the need and refer people directly instead of the red tape that often accompanies other charitable initiatives.

"CHIP doesn't make those judgment calls. We rely on the social work staff, the front-line workers to determine the greatest needs," he said.

Locally, the partnerships include St. Michael's hospital, Le Centre Francophone de Toronto, Perram House, William Osler Health Centre - Etobicoke, Rouge Valley Centenary - Scarborough and The Salvation Army Toronto Grace Health Centre.

CHIP's latest partnership is with south Riverdale's Bridgepoint Health, a facility for patients with complex chronic disease and disability.

"For some time now we've been looking to establish a relationship with Bridgepoint and this initial \$5,000 donation will get that off the ground," Laporte said of the year-long pilot project.

Wendy Cameron, professional practice leader in social work and discharge planning at Bridgepoint Health, said she is thrilled CHIP Charitable Services approached them to work together.

"We have a lot of patients who are marginalized, isolated or who are on fixed incomes. The cost of a TV or a phone can be just something more than they can manage," said Cameron, who leads a team of social workers who ensure the hospital's patients are safely discharged and their social needs in both the community as well as at the hospital are adequately met.

She said having a phone in one's room can help connect patients with their loved ones and that something as simple as a TV helps them feel linked to the outside world.

"A lot of our long-term patients are from across Ontario. Some are far away from home," said Cameron, noting Bridgepoint offers a computer station for patients on each floor but that not everyone is necessarily Internet

savvy.

Further, the nine-year Bridgepoint staffer said it can be both comforting to patients as well as loved ones to be able to speak directly to each other, especially when it's tough and sometimes expensive to visit each other in person.

She said paying for these services, not to mention the additional cost of making long-distance phone calls, can cost upward of \$100 per month. Those bills can add up during an extended period of care, she said.

Laporte said CHIP is looking for a local corporate partner to continue to fund the program.

"It's all about communities helping individuals at their local hospital. Ideally local partnerships will help keep the program local and ongoing," he said, adding CHIP provides the framework and that groups provide the capital.

Visit www.chipcharity.com for more information.

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