



University Health Network

Media Advisory

Posting wait times increases accountability, says University Health Network CEO

Toronto, September 8, 2004 – The average breast cancer patient will see a specialist at University Health Network (UHN) about 26 days after referral from another doctor, and receive surgery if required 25 days later. People requiring a hip replacement to improve quality of life could wait from 13 to 43 weeks. And almost half of patients showing up at UHN emergency rooms will receive an in-patient bed in less than four hours if the decision is made to admit them.

Those are just three examples of more than 125 wait times for different medical and surgical procedures which University Health Network posts on its public Web (www.uhn.ca) in a special section called *Earning Your Trust*.

“Wait times have been on the agendas and minds of politicians, the public and media and I believe that UHN became the first hospital in Ontario to post this information on its Web page back in October 2003,” said Tom Closson, President & CEO, UHN.

“Our organization values the principle of accountability – being accountable about the service we provide to government, the public and above all, our patients. We want to be as transparent as possible.”

University Health Network – including Toronto General, Toronto Western and Princess Margaret Hospital – provides a variety of high-end complex clinical and surgical procedures, primarily through its seven main “program groupings.”

They include Advanced Medicine & Surgery; Community & Population Health; Heart & Circulation; Musculoskeletal Health & Arthritis; Neurosciences; Oncology & Blood Disorders; and Transplant.

The wait time information currently posted includes procedures within each program grouping, the most recently measured wait time, the desired target time based on available benchmarks, and definitions of the wait time. By clicking on a specific procedure, users can also pull up charts, which track wait time histories.

“University Health Network continues to be a leader in pioneering healthcare innovations,” said George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. “This wait time initiative will be an invaluable tool benefiting patients, providers and government.”



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Other information posted on the Web for accountability includes clinical care performance information, a variety of indicators and reports which provide snapshots of performance and links to external sources such as patient survey results. UHN has also launched an online physician directory to enable patients and referring physicians to get access to appropriate care.

The information currently posted is “just the tip of the iceberg” and there is room to improve details and the context of the information so it’s easier to use. The *Earning Your Trust* page on UHN’s Web site includes an online survey asking patients, family members, healthcare professionals, journalists and others about how user friendly the postings are and how information could be improved.

Mr. Closson said he would like to see more hospitals posting online wait times so consumers can do more comparative shopping.

UHN’s current wait time measures are produced retrospectively, demonstrating recent care performance. It is not a wait list management system such as the system implemented at the Cardiac Care Network of Ontario, which triages patients based on the acuity of their illness to various providers to streamline access to the system. Mr. Closson said government investment into the Cardiac Care Network’s system has proven beneficial and he would like to see province-wide registries in place to triage patients to care institutions through more connected, coordinated access.

“Tracking wait times is certainly necessary to measure the responsiveness of the healthcare system so that scarce resources can be allocated accountably to where they are most needed, and in an efficient way,” said Closson. “Wait times are the key issue in healthcare today and we need to continue to seek out ways to use them to benchmark the quality of service we are providing our patients.”

University Health Network is a major landmark in Canada’s healthcare system, and a teaching partner of the University of Toronto. Building on the strengths and reputation of each of our three remarkable hospitals, Toronto General Hospital, Toronto Western Hospital and Princess Margaret Hospital, UHN brings together the innovation, talent and resources needed to achieve global impact on the health care scene and provide exemplary patient care.

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