Board of Health Membership Update

Provincial appointees Kerri Davies and Greg Connolley were reappointed to the Peterborough County-City Board of Health by the Ontario government, each for another three year term.

Board of Health Response to the Expert Panel Report

Board members discussed their formal response to the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care following the proposed changes to the governance structure of public health outlined in the recent Minister’s Report from the Expert Panel on Public Health. The board expressed their concern that proposed changes to regional governance would displace and threaten the local participation and engagement of municipal councils and First Nations councils. Currently, the Health Protection and Promotion Act allows for First Nations to decide whether to enter into agreements with their local boards of health. As one of only two public health units with First Nations leadership serving on its board of health, the board feared that the proposed regional structure could silence the voice of local public health and jeopardize its strong local connections. In addition, the board stated that rather than creating new regional entities, a more viable and sustainable solution would be provincial support for voluntary and strategic amalgamations where they make sense, based on a set of criteria and an appropriate funding formula.

Burden of Occupational Cancer in Ontario

Dr. Salvaterra shared the findings of the newly released Burden of Occupational Cancer in Ontario report prepared by the Occupational Cancer Research Centre. Overall, cancer remains the leading cause of death in Ontario at approximately 27,000 deaths each year. Occupational exposures are often overlooked despite being a substantial and preventable burden of cancer. Dr. Salvaterra noted that we spend one-third of our time in workplaces, so occupational exposures are important to measure. The report focuses on the most common carcinogens found in Ontario workplaces, particularly those that make the greatest contribution to occupational cancer (i.e., solar radiation, asbestos, diesel engine exhaust and crystalline silica). The report stated that 1,400 cases of non-melanoma skin cancer are attributable to occupational exposure to UV radiation. The report also stated that 2-5% of breast cancer cases in women are probably attributable to shift work. The report includes evidence-based policy recommendations for government, Ontario’s occupational health and safety system, employers and non-governmental organizations. Recommendations included mandating all employers with outdoor workers to develop sun safety programs to prevent exposure to UV radiation.

Healthcare Worker Influenza Immunization Rates: 2016-2017 Season

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care requires the collection of influenza vaccine coverage rates for staff from nursing homes and hospitals. Peterborough Public Health released its annual report on healthcare worker (HCW) flu shot rates from last year’s flu season based on staff immunization coverage rates collected as of December 15, 2016. The total average HCW flu immunization coverage rate increased to 79% from 75% in the 2015-2016 season. Influenza vaccination provides benefits to HCWs and to the patients for whom they
care. According to an editorial in the Canadian Medical Association Journal, each season 20% of HCWs get influenza and some of them may shed virus up to a day before symptoms appear. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) considers the provision of influenza vaccination to be an essential component of the standard of care for all HCWs for the protection of their patients. A total of 165 local influenza cases were reported for the 2016/2017 surveillance season. This number is far less than the total number of cases in the Peterborough area as not all cases are lab-confirmed. Eight influenza outbreaks were reported in long-term care and retirement residences for the same period. The full report which includes flu immunization coverage rates by individual facility can be found in the October 11, 2017 Board of Health meeting package on pages 75-80.

Food Insecurity in Peterborough

Each year, Peterborough Public Health (PPH) staff research the local food costs required to provide a basic nutritious diet (referred to as the Nutritious Food Basket). These costs are compared to a variety of income scenarios to determine affordability. According to the 2017 PPH Limited Incomes Report, the monthly cost of feeding a family of four is $899 in Peterborough City and County (a slight decrease of 0.88% from 2016). Although there was a slight decrease in the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket from 2016 to 2017, overall, food prices locally have increased by 14% over the past five years. It must be stressed however, that the issue of affordability is not the cost of food, but that incomes are too low to meet basic needs. This annual report has consistently demonstrated, that people currently receiving social assistance rates, or earning minimum wage, struggle to cover the costs of both housing and nutritious food. Recent data from the Canadian Community Health Survey – Household Food Security Module found that the Peterborough Public Health region had the highest rate of household food insecurity at 16.5% when compared to all other Ontario Health Unit regions.

Next meeting:

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday, November 8, 2017 at 5:30 p.m. in the Curve Lake Community Centre, located at 20 Whetung Street East, Curve Lake First Nation.