
HALDIMAND COUNTY

Memorandum EMS-M03-2021 Palliative Care Program

For Consideration by Council in Committee on December 7, 2021



To: Mayor Hewitt and Members of Council

From: Jason Gallagher, Manager, Emergency Services/Fire Chief

Patients enter palliative care when they are suffering from a serious illness or are terminally ill and no longer require treatment. The objective is to help improve the patient's life during their final stages, but it can also be applied to other stages of illness. For instance conditions such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, heart disease, kidney disease, and cancer can also benefit from palliative care. This dedicated level of care plays an essential role in the treatment of disease as well as end-of-life care. This care is typically administered in hospital or a hospice.

In April of 2021, the Province announced that they would be launching a new pilot program that would allow 33 communities to treat palliative care patients for symptoms at home rather than in hospitals. Haldimand County was selected as one of the 33 pilots with funding fully provided by the Province. The program had a soft-launch in September 2021 and is now in full operation. More details on the application process are included below. The goal of the program is to have paramedics "treat and refer" to a palliative care team at the patient's home, which will enable our paramedics to support vulnerable patients in the most appropriate setting, while avoiding unnecessary emergency department visits. This program would also have the benefit of assisting in reducing hallway medicine and delays in off-loading patients which are both caused by large amounts of hospital visits.

Prior to the implementation of this program, paramedics were obligated to bring 911 patients to hospital emergency departments despite the availability of other care and treatment options in the community. Under the new pilot program, eligible palliative care patients can receive care from the paramedics in their homes, and therefore do not require an emergency department visit. Having said that, anytime during the interaction or response of the paramedic the patient can ask to be transported to the hospital, and the paramedics will comply. Also, if the paramedic determines the patient requires emergency care not available in the home, the paramedic can determine that transport is required.

Patients who qualify for the program, which is determined by the Palliative Care Teams, which are the patients current health care providers under the Palliative Care Program, i.e. nurses, doctors, etc. These patients, are entered into the Ambulance Dispatch records, so paramedics are aware when responding to these residences that there is a palliative care patient on scene, which will allow paramedics to start mentally preparing for the call.

In regards to the "treat and refer" model, specially trained paramedics treat palliative care patients on-site in their home, which can include administering medication for pain, shortness of breath, hallucinations, agitation, terminal congested breathing and nausea or vomiting. Once a patient has been treated, paramedics directly co-ordinate follow-up care with a local hospice, which is a facility that offers a type of health care that focuses on the treatment and care of terminally ill patients, or the patient's primary palliative care team to provide longer-term treatment options.

The pilot will last one year, after which it will be evaluated to assess outcomes and identify where adjustments might be needed before expansion throughout the province.

Haldimand County Paramedic Services was one of the first services in the Province of Ontario to begin the palliative care program. Back in the fall of 2020 Haldimand, along with Norfolk, Brant, and Six Nations in partnership with Local Community Health Teams submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Health (MOH) to be able to participate in this program. Ottawa was the first service to participate and laid the groundwork for other services. Hamilton, Dufferin, and Niagara had also sent proposals, and were approved prior, starting their programs close to the provincial announcement.

In early 2021, it was communicated by the Director of the Ministry of Health, Emergency Services Branch that Haldimand, Norfolk, Brant, and Six Nations proposal was approved. Brant was the next service to go live. Haldimand and Six Nations together went live on September 8, 2021. Norfolk's program went live on December 1, 2021.

All of Haldimand County Paramedic staff have been trained to the level required to administer the medications required for palliative patients, as well as, took extensive training on how to assess and treat these vulnerable patients. One of the biggest challenges for paramedics, is the fact that when we are called to service, our job is to preserve and save lives. In some cases, paramedics will be on scene to assist in making a patient comfortable and at the same time witness the death process. This is new for paramedics. Paramedics normally deal with death in all aspects, but during this time we are actively trying to save the patient's life. This is why, as part of the paramedic training, they were taught on how to deal with these difficult situations as we are there for the patient, but in most cases the family will be there as well. Most palliative patients will live at home with caregivers who are often family members, so the paramedics also took training on how to deal with caregivers and their needs during this difficult time.

As previously stated the pilot project is anticipated to last 1 year from the onset of program start, which for Haldimand means an end date of September 8, 2022. Being a pilot program, the medications are supplied at no cost for one year. Training for this program was covered by the County's current training budget, through our spring training continued education program which is mandatory by the MOH to deliver annually. There was no further costs associated.

During the pilot project Haldimand County Paramedic Services is responsible for collecting data on number of patients (approximately 33 currently), medication use, results of the response, provide feedback from patients and/or family following an interaction, and meeting regularly with provincial and community partners to discuss program progression and to prove the need moving forward. Haldimand County Paramedic Services is hoping that due to our data and commitment to these patients that the need for this program is permanent, as it will lower emergency room visits, allow patients to stay in their homes, and ultimately decrease costs to the health care system.