



Renfrew County and District Health Unit
"Optimal Health for All in Renfrew County and District"

Memorandum

Date: January 05, 2022

To: Renfrew County and District Residents

Re: A public appeal on behalf of Health Care Workers for respect, courtesy and politeness

Who could have imagined the current state of the pandemic? What happened to the promise of newly arrived vaccines last Christmas and widespread optimism for 2021? Simply put, Omicron took us by storm.

Cases have risen exponentially, tests are in short supply, and demand for vaccines far exceeds supply. Worse, the local booking system crashed which made setting up an appointment an additional exercise in frustration. At this time when we are all exhausted and struggling to balance life's tasks mentally and physically, the Government has rightly chosen to ramp up restrictions to protect our health care system once again.

Hospitals could soon be overwhelmed with additional cases, however, the physical capacity, beds and ICUs, may not be primary concern. The breaking point could be the lack of health care workers to treat patients.

Healthcare workers are already overworked and burnt out. Now with increased exposures from work, family, and the community, we are seeing more COVID-19 cases than ever amongst front line staff. They are increasing their precautions like the rest of us in efforts to "keep all hands-on deck."

Over the past weeks, we have seen a dramatic increase in verbal abuse of health care workers for circumstances beyond their control!

Does the receptionist at a vaccine clinic have any control over a collapsed internet registration system? Does a nurse have any responsibility for a shortage of vaccines and delayed appointments when she has spent the past year vaccinating people daily? Is Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU) responsible for a lack of rapid antigen tests?

The answer is categorically no! Sad to say, but Omicron took us all by surprise and we were not prepared. Yet, an increasing number of the public think it is

their right to complain and verbally abuse overworked and now fragile healthcare workers whose immediate families have seen little of them over the holidays.

We understand the public's frustration, and no one feels it more than front line staff. While we continue to have widespread public support, an increasing number of people are venting their frustrations at us. The number of offenders may not be large, but the impact is enormous. It is harmful and hurtful.

My message to these inconsiderate people is "stop it". These behaviours will no longer be tolerated. Furthermore, be careful not to bite the hand that helps you, because healthcare workers are giving up in exhaustion and disgust. This means that hand may not be there to help you or a loved one when you need it most.

The vast majority of the public has been highly supportive, and this has contributed to Renfrew County and District's success during the pandemic. However, it is time to remind you that we all need to be in this battle together and that means that everyone needs to do their part. Kindness and respect are as much a part of the solution as vaccines and the strict observance of public health measures.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "RAG", with a horizontal line underneath it.

Dr. Robert Cushman
Acting Medical Officer of Health
Renfrew County and District Health Unit