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Hospitals and midwives: Partnering to meet community reprocessing needs

By Amber Lepage-Monette

Healthcare doesn't just take place in hospital. It takes place where we live: both in the community, like when you get a dental cleaning, and in our homes, like when a baby is welcomed into a family.

Healthcare providers who are out in the community providing high-quality care meet an important need in allowing people to live and thrive in their everyday lives, while at the same time supporting hospitals to focus on more acute patients.

And while following appropriate infection prevention and control practices are a cornerstone to providing high-quality, safe care, consistently meeting rigorous reprocessing guidelines for medical devices can be challenging for community based providers who must be experts in many things.

This is where hospitals come in. Already staffed with fully accredited technicians and outfitted with equipment that can handle a high volume of equipment, hospitals are perfectly poised to fill this community need.

Guelph General Hospital (GGH) is just one organization already providing this valuable service to community partners. Because they were already providing reprocessing services to other hospitals and local health-care facilities, like Homewood Health Care, it was quite easy last year to also welcome one of their local midwifery practices on board.

"We consider them to be a big part of our family at GGH and they feel like they're part of our team as well – it's a nice partnership," says Jennifer Ritchie, Manager of Medical Device Reprocessing Services at GGH.



Guelph isn't the only region doing this. Midwives at Countryside Midwifery Services (which has offices in Milverton and Palmerston) approached Stratford General Hospital about taking over their reprocessing needs. The hospital was receptive from the beginning, says midwife Mandy Levcrown.

"They said 'Absolutely!' and had already been doing it for VON nurses and for other community based groups for years."

Though overall the transition has gone very well, Levcrown says there are some small logistical challenges. Because Countryside Midwifery has a nearly 50 per cent home birth rate and now the equipment is reprocessed elsewhere, the midwives needed to evaluate how much equipment they would need to provide seamless care while waiting to pick up the next batch.

Transportation is another challenge for the midwives, especially those

Photo credit: Association of Ontario Midwives. working at the northern Palmerston clinic. Finding a similar set-up at a site further north would ease that burden for those midwives, but for now, Levcrown says they are happy with the system in place.

Centralized, hospital-based reprocessing meets many needs: it not only addresses Canadian Standards Association recommendations, but also removes the burden from time-strapped care providers while enhancing healthcare.

"We have the capacity to lend our expertise to our partners in the community," says Ritchie. "In the end, it's a valuable service that bolsters health care provided to a wide range of community members." ■

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Amber Lepage-Monette is a Communications Officer at the Association of Ontario Midwives.