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Suicidal teens, stuffed ERs to get respite from \$500,000 program



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Councillor Allan Hubley said the new Bridges program would give parents the tools they need to navigate the mental health system if their teen suffers a mental health crisis. Metro/Graham Lanktree

Teens who suffer through the suicidal thoughts, anxiety and depression of a mental health crisis will have a place to turn for help besides the ER as a \$500,000 intensive treatment program sets to launch in 2013.

“Forty per cent of cases come back into the hospital because we don’t have adequate programs to help them, said Alex Munter, CEO of the Children’s Hospital of Eastern Ontario as he described the drive behind the Bridges project.

In the past few years the hospital has seen a 50 per cent increase in mental health visits to the ER, Munter said, noting that the number of referrals to mental health out patient clinics has doubled in the same time. One in five Ontario youth face a mental health challenge and 70 per cent of illnesses have their onset in adolescence.

“As a parent your number one priority is the health of your child. We were trying to find out where to go when he came out of CHEO,” said city Councillor Allan Hubley, of his family’s drive to help their 15-year-old son Jamie who took his own life in October 2011. “He didn’t need intensive 24-hour care, but he still needed care. We as a family need to know how to help him through that period.”

With the backing of \$500,000 in annual funding from the Champlain Local Health Integration Network, Bridges will help families navigate the mental health system after their child is discharged from the hospital. The focus is on recovery through a team of psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, nurses and child and youth counselors with the aim of preventing relapse and readmission.

Officials were vague about a precise start date for the program, saying they would start taking referrals in January with their first patient visits in late February or early March. Families will be briefed on accessing the program when they visit a hospital with their child for a mental health problem, they said.

The program brings together expertise from the Youth Services Bureau, CHEO, the Royal Ottawa Hospital and Ottawa Public Health which will all work to provide treatment for the roughly 150 teens who fall into the gap in mental health services every year.

“This is the first time we’re talking about solutions,” said Hubley, adding that the problem of mental health has been identified with little to address it.

“You’ll now know who you need to see and where to go to see them.” he said. “That’s critical, lifesaving information.”



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