**Hospital care in our community — Focus on Southlake Regional Health Centre.** By Donna Clark.

**Note, the following is the full interview with Barbara Steed and Jennifer Ritter.**

We are fortunate to have three excellent community hospitals to meet our needs: Southlake, Markham-Stouffville and its’ partner, the 20-bed Uxbridge facility.

What you may not know is that Southlake (SL) is both a community hospital and an ***advanced regional care centre*** for cardiac, stroke and cancer. The advanced regional programs cover the northern GTA and as far north as Muskoka. It is the fourth busiest hospital in Ontario with 580 physicians, 3500 staff and 790 volunteers.

Below is an interview with two key individuals at SL on some of the exciting initiatives happening that may positively impact the health and wellness of many of us here in Ballantrae. First is Barbara Steed, Executive Vice President, Clinical Services and Vice President, Regional Cancer Program and second is Jennifer Ritter, President and CEO, Southlake Regional Health Centre Foundation

**Q:  Barb, could you explain what being a regional centre means for patients living here in BGCC?**

Our number one priority is to ensure leading edge care close to home. If you live in our communities, you should not have to travel downtown for your care. It’s stressful and with the added burden and expense, leaving our community for care, away from the support networks of family and friends. Southlake provides a full range of healthcare services with the benefit of advanced regional programs that enable our communities to receive world class care, where it feels like home. Our hometown approach to care means that you are not a number.

Being close to home is especially important when facing a diagnosis of cancer. The Stronach Regional Cancer Centre (SRCC), represents the regionally designated program for the Central Regional Cancer Program. Our Regional Cancer Program is consistently ranked as one of the top in the province, delivering programs and service for patients living in York Region, North York and South Simcoe. We provide the widest range of programs and services including cancer screening, diagnostic testing, radiation, chemotherapy and supportive care. We provide both inpatient and outpatient services, informed by innovative research, delivered by our oncology experts, in our state-of-the-art treatment facility. We co-lead shared-care cancer programs with Princess Margaret Cancer Centre and SickKids. The SRCC was established 12 years ago working closely with Princess Margaret Cancer Centre and many of our leading clinicians work out of both centres. We are soon announcing a new partnership with the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. The first of its kind, it will enable our patients to have access to larger and broader research and clinical trials. It will also provide greater access to both patient education and staff education.

It is equally important for cardiac care—especially when time is of the essence. When you or a loved one faces a cardiac incident there is comfort in knowing that world class cardiac care is right down the street. At one time, people would drive past Southlake to go to Toronto for their cardiac care, now specialists come to Southlake for the opportunity to do great things like provide treatments you can’t get anywhere else. What we do is only done at academic centres. Envisioning today what the heart needs tomorrow, our Regional Cardiac Care Program is fueled by innovation and led with compassion, to deliver the best outcomes and experience for our patients. The fourth largest cardiac program in Ontario, residents of BGCC may not know that we offer a comprehensive cardiac program that includes cardiac diagnostics, surgery, interventional cardiology, electrophysiology, advanced heart failure management and cardiovascular prevention and rehabilitation.

We encourage you to ask your family physician to refer you to Southlake for your cardiac and cancer care.

**Q:  Most of our residents are older.  What new initiatives might we want to know about?**

Southlake@home launched in March 2019 and is the first initiative of its kind in Ontario and designed to improve care for older adults with complex medical and social needs who are transitioning home after an admission to Southlake. We ensure that these patients have the support they need to stay well at home through the coordination of homecare and community support services. Before patients leave the hospital, their Southlake@home coordinator meets with them, their family and hospital team to create a personal care plan to be shared by all involved in delivered homecare. On returning home, patients receive a visit their first day at home and are cared for through home visits, phone calls (including a 24/7 phone number for questions or concerns) and telemonitoring to ensure goals are met after patients return home and that their care plan can be adjusted if needs change.

At Southlake, we continue to advance men’s health with some exciting new equipment to ensure men in our community can receive the very best care close to home.

Southlake is one of the busiest urology centres in the GTA as we serve a large and aging population, plus we are the urology destination for many people outside our catchment area. Ensuring our communities have access to the best men’s health care is critical. Our urology operating room and ambulatory suites are busy as we work to diagnose and treat prostate, bladder and kidney cancers, bladder infections, kidney stones, and urinary tract issues.

Recently, Southlake was fortunate to receive $1.7M in funds raised in our community through our Men’s Health Initiative to purchase two extraordinary pieces of equipment, a new interventional urology workstation and a Holmium laser, both used exclusively in our urology operating room. This is a really exciting development for Southlake and our communities. The workstation is a state-of-the-art operating table that dramatically modernizes our capabilities. Used during surgical procedures for urological issues, it provides incredible resolution in X-ray (fluoroscopy) and endoscopy and improves patient comfort and safety during delicate procedures. The Holmium laser is used mainly for the treatment of tumours and kidney stones, fragmenting much larger stones in significantly less time. This means less anesthesia for patients and more efficiency in the operating room which helps us to treat more patients and reduce our wait times. Most importantly, it means the men of our communities don’t have to travel to receive their care.

We know that with COVID-19 deferred surgical care is on everyone’s mind, especially in the area of hip and knee replacements which are so critical to improving quality of life for our patients.

Southlake has developed a plan to gradually resume elective and scheduled surgeries while keeping patient and staff safety top of mind. Our Surgery Team has various highly qualified healthcare professionals that support a wide range of surgical procedures across 11 surgical specialties including orthopedics. Southlake is one of the most progressive hospitals for musculoskeletal surgical care and our surgeons are always seeking to pioneer new approaches and advance surgical care for our patients especially in the area of hip and knee surgeries.

For example, Dr. Patrick Gamble was among the first in the GTA to do what’s called an Anterior Hip Replacement. This minimally-invasive approach, splits the muscle to replace the hip. It means smaller incisions, less pain, and faster recovery.  Instead of staying four to five days in hospital, patients are home the same day, often walking within six hours and taking the stairs in days. Southlake also offers hip resurfacing as an innovative alternative to full hip replacements. The procedure involves reshaping the femoral head and placing a cap. The procedure makes it feel more “normal” for the patient and preserves bone, which can make future revision surgeries, if they are required, much safer and easier.

In the area of knee replacement, Southlake’s anesthesiologists and orthopedic surgical teams are finding new ways to help patients who have total knee replacement surgery better manage their pain at home. Knee replacements can be a painful experience and our teams are always looking for ways to do things better for our patients. In the past, patients would have their total knee replacement surgery and use acetaminophen and anti-inflammatories as well as stronger opioid medications to manage their pain. Patients now have the option of using an adductor canal catheter—a simple disposable catheter, inserted by the anesthesiologist into the mid-thigh near the nerve responsible for sensation to the front of the knee. A small disposable pump continuously delivers local anesthetic, keeping the front of the knee anesthetized. Patients are able to better manage their pain and reduce the use of these opioids after their surgery. Patients are often able to go home the same day of their surgery, avoiding an overnight stay. This enables patients to be mobilized faster so that they can start their physiotherapy more quickly. It also enables Southlake to increase our capacity to do more knee replacement surgeries.

In the area of cancer care, for more than a decade, Southlake and its Stronach Regional Cancer Centre (SRCC) has redefined what a regional hospital is truly capable of. Combining the expertise and care options of an academic hospital system with deep community connections, we balance leading edge treatment with patient-centered care. We are growing our capacity for radiation therapy by adding a fifth linear accelerator and replacing our original fleet to the latest technology. We are expanding our Systemic Therapy Program by increasing our chemotherapy chairs from 26 to 42 and expanding our pharmacy to meet the new demand. Finally, and the most exciting news is that a brand-new PET-CT machine has arrived at Southlake! This leading-edge equipment supports advanced diagnosis, staging and monitoring of cancer. Currently, there is no PET-CT in the region and all patients must travel downtown or to Mississauga for this critical screening. We will be ready to receive our first patient by next March.

Our Regional Cardiac Care Program is at the forefront of innovation to ensure our patients have access to the latest advances in cardiac care. Southlake’s doctors are often the first to perform leading edge procedures in Ontario, Canada and even the world. They’re leaders in their fields, published globally and consulted by programs of all sizes. They have many provincial, national and global ‘firsts.’ They choose to work at Southlake because it’s a place where innovation is an imperative whereby, they can push the limits of their craft and set new standards for others to follow to the benefit of patients everywhere.

Southlake’s Dr. Carolyn Teng is a cardiac surgeon and one of the few experts in the province performing minimally invasive mitral valve repair and replacement surgery for eligible patients who in the past would have faced open heart surgery. This unique approach uses a small, two-inch incision, a high definition camera and specialized instruments to repair or replace the valve, a minimally-invasive procedure that means faster recovery and excellent results for patients. Southlake is the only hospital in the GTA to offer this innovative procedure as part of a full spectrum of treatment options.

For patients with acute arrhythmias that have not responded well to medical therapy or cannot tolerate an ablation procedure, Southlake is using a new less invasive approach called Stereotactic Body Radiation Therapy (SBRT). Southlake’s cardiac and cancer teams have been working closely for the past two years with Washington University in the United States. This treatment uses Southlake’s linear accelerators, used for radiation therapy in its Cancer Centre, to radiate the heart to interrupt the electrical signals that are causing their irregular heartbeat. This procedure is non-invasive, requires no anesthetic or catheters to the heart and lasts only 30 minutes. Southlake is one of the few hospitals in Canada, and globally, to treat a patient with SBRT. This treatment required collaboration between nurses, heart rhythm and radiation therapists, radiation physicists, radiation oncologists, anesthesiologists, and electrophysiologists to plan and deliver treatment.

Southlake’s Dr. Liane Porepa became the first doctor in Ontario to implant a CardioMEMS device in a cardiac patient. The system measures pulmonary artery pressure and heart rate through a sensor that is implanted into the heart through a small non-invasive procedure. The implantation is done without anesthetic and some patients are ready to go home the same day. With this device implanted, the patient’s life can get back to normal, without multiple checkups and visits. They don’t need to uproot their lives to be close to their care but they can be monitored remotely, alerting doctors to heart irregularities months before those irregulars become critical, detecting symptoms of heart failure earlier. With one look at their mobile phone, doctors can understand exactly what’s going on inside their patient’s heart in an instant.

 Q:  Jennifer, we always hear about the challenges in healthcare funding.   What role does government play versus private donations?

Funding for healthcare is a partnership. While government supports operations, we are dependent upon the generosity of our communities to support new and replacement equipment as well as renovations to existing spaces. Even new capital builds and expansions will have a local share that the Foundation fundraises for, inspiring our community to help. Simply put, we cannot provide leading edge and compassionate care without our communities by our side. With the support of our communities, we can ensure we have access to the latest technology to ensure our patients receive advanced diagnostic testing, innovative treatments, and leading-edge procedures and also attract and retain top clinical talent.

 Q:  So, the SL Foundation is key to helping raise the funds needed for life-saving equipment, infrastructure upgrades and expansions.   What are the biggest needs at the moment?

The Stronach Regional Cancer Centre has served our communities with distinction for over a decade but now we face a tipping point. Our communities are expanding and aging and the demands on Southlake for cancer care are growing at an accelerated rate. COVID-19 has further exacerbated this situation with cancer care being deferred. Yet, not only must Southlake address increased demand for care but also keep pace with new technology so that our communities can continue to receive advanced care, here at home.

To create the cancer care our communities deserve, we will soon launch our $20M Campaign, HERE is Where Cancer Meets its Match. Government funding only gets us halfway to our goal. This Campaign will bring the latest technology to the SRCC to ensure our talented clinicians can deliver the best care—and the best chance for our patients to survive their cancer—right HERE. With the investment of our community together we will:

* Bring the first PET-CT (Positron Emission Tomography and Computed Tomography) to our Region to expedite diagnosis and support personalized treatment and monitoring
* Expand our Radiation Therapy Program with new technology, replacing our original fleet of linear accelerators and adding a fifth to treat 400 more patients a year
* Expand our Systemic Therapy Program for chemotherapy treatment to over 870 more patients with an additional 6868 treatment visits annually to reduce wait times for lifesaving care
* Expand outpatient care for acute leukemia patients so that the most vulnerable don’t have to travel downtown for all of their supportive care
* Replace our MRI that is at end of life and often out of service for repair to conduct 8000 scans a year

 Q:  Finally, if someone is interested in finding out more, including making a donation or volunteering, where can they go?

We welcome you to reach out to us to learn more.

To learn more about Southlake please visit [www.southlake.ca](http://www.southlake.ca)

To learn more about how you can help by donating please visit [www.southlake.ca/foundation](http://www.southlake.ca/foundation)

Interested in a really rewarding volunteer experience? Building healthy communities through outstanding patient care begins by improving the patient experience and our valued volunteers are critical to our success. Whether assisting with wayfinding, registration, recreation, research or bedside visits, the role of a volunteer is, and always will be to deliver the best patient experience. We also have various fundraising volunteer roles through the Foundation. Learn more about volunteering by visiting [www.southlake.ca](http://www.southlake.ca)

BGCC residents can also contact the Foundation to receive our annual report or to sign-up for our newsletter by contacting us at foundation@southlakeregional.org or 905-836-7333.

We are very excited to be working with BGCC to develop webinars and seminars on topics of interest that will be provided later in the year through your Recreation Centre.  We are truly grateful for the opportunity.