Sunnybrook Shines a Spotlight on 2020-21
Sunnybrook Shines a Spotlight on 2020-21 when it matters most
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Sunnybrook continued its course on the frontline of the pandemic, while at the same time making incredible gains in patient care, research and teaching over the last year.
Introduction

The organization’s research team collaborated to isolate the virus, helping researchers in Canada and across the world develop better diagnostic testing, treatments and vaccines.

Clinicians raced to think outside of the box on how to best provide care during the pandemic. Virtual care accelerated across the hospital. A drive-through flu vaccination clinic was organized at the Bayview campus, as well as innovative flu vaccine outreach to stakeholders in the North Toronto Ontario Health Team to ensure community members were protected against influenza.

In December 2020, residents of the Veterans Centre received their first COVID-19 vaccinations. John Boyd, one of the oldest known Veterans in Canada, received his second dose of the COVID-19 vaccine from Dr. David Shergold, a veteran himself. A short exchange between the two Veterans: “Thank you for fighting this battle, this COVID-19 battle,” said Dr. Shergold. “It’s an honour,” responded John. “This is not my first pandemic,” referring to having lived through the Spanish flu from 1918 to 1920.

The physical landscape of the hospital changed, with the opening of the COVID-19 Assessment Centre, and finally the Bayview campus’ vaccine clinic. Two new units were created to provide capacity for scheduled procedures and to maintain space for any potential surge in COVID-19 patients. K3C became the new temporary home for the Complex Malignant Hematology Unit and a new 32-bed general internal medicine unit opened in K3E.

Amid the pandemic, Sunnybrook looked ahead as the organization embarked on a new strategic planning process. This roadmap to 2025 further augments the four established directions – personalized and precise treatments, integrated and sustainable models of care, quality and better care experience and high performing teams – by introducing strategic enablers. These enablers cover performance measurement and management, digital and virtual care and sustainability and investment.

Sunnybrook also shone light on the ugliness of racism, and began to work on ensuring equitable access to care and opportunities to participate in research and education. The President’s Task Force on Anti-Racism was formed to improve the organization’s performance and ensure action is taken.

The hospital was honoured as a global leader in neurology in by Newsweek magazine, and also one of the world’s best hospitals. Individuals shone too, with Dr. Nir Lipsman named a recipient of Canada’s Top 40 Under 40 and Dr. Shahriar Shahrokhi awarded the prestigious Prix d’Excellence – Specialist of the Year from the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

Sunnybrook Foundation continued to support the advancement of research, education and equipment initiatives at Sunnybrook, raising $72 million in the past year.

At the heart of the unprecedented challenges and rapid changes of the last year were Sunnybrook’s patients and families, and the teams who cared for them. Phyllis Ridgway, Canada’s oldest person, is just one example of an appreciative patient.

Phyllis received her first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine just a few days after celebrating her 114th birthday and said, “This is the best birthday I’ve ever had.”
Financial Performance

Fiscal 2020/21 was dominated by COVID. There were some periods of near normalcy in which the care provided was not overshadowed by caring for COVID patients, but primarily the impact of COVID was felt throughout the year. This was evident in how we needed to care for patients and staff, and resulted in many financial challenges including incremental, and at times high cost, personal protective equipment, lower completion of Ministry volume funded activity, and fewer people on campus due to a number of factors, including work from home, no / few visitor policy, virtual care, resulting in a significant loss of non-Ministry revenue such as parking and other retail revenues. Sunnybrook is grateful to the Ministry for its decision to not only support the incremental cost of caring for patients and staff but also to support the loss of both Ministry and non-Ministry revenue.

Sunnybrook has closed fiscal 2020/21 with revenue over expenses of $20.2M, or 1.6% of total revenue. This result is in line with prior years’ results and consistent with Sunnybrook’s aim each year to generate funds to invest in capital renewal. This approach is supported by the Ontario Hospital Association who have historically recommended generating between 2 – 3 per cent of total revenue for reinvestment purposes.

Sunnybrook’s ability to generate a favourable outcome for the year is largely due to its usual business practices, including ensuring an annual balanced budget, achieved in June 2020 after receiving its allocation of Ministry funding for fiscal 2020/21, not including the impact of COVID. Sunnybrook’s commitment to being balanced each year is one it diligently upholds in order to ensure its financial sustainability and its dedication to safe, quality practices for its patients and staff. As noted earlier, the incremental cost and lost revenue impact of COVID, was eliminated due to the investments made by the Ministry, allowing Sunnybrook, as is usual each year, to benefit from one-time events or various favourable variances, as explained in the following paragraph.

There were a few large contributors to the favourable outcome, most that arise annually, but for fiscal 2020/21 the order of magnitude was more significant. Specifically, $15.5M or 77% of the revenue over expenses generated was as a result of a combination of planned one-time and ongoing expenditures in activities unrelated to COVID which had to be deferred, and depreciation planned that did not arise due to delays in expending the committed capital expenditures. The costs will instead be incurred in fiscal 2021/22 using the funds retained. Other contributors to the favourable results are related to payments for over-performance on volumes performed in fiscal 2019/20 and other one-time items arising from prior year changes in estimates or in-year rebates.

In the coming months, Management will be refreshing / developing a plan for the Board’s consideration, which, consistent with prior years will include investment in the renewal of healthcare equipment, information technology, and infrastructure support. All are critical. It is however imperative to highlight the need to address Sunnybrook’s aged infrastructure. The soon to be completed Facility Condition Assessment Report again notes a poor result for the Facility Condition Index but also a very significant increase in renewal requirements. In order to make the required investments in the old infrastructure, and importantly to address the significant ICU capacity constraints in Ontario, that have been further highlighted by the experience during COVID, both of these initiatives are included in Sunnybrook’s recently concluded Master Plan and Sunnybrook is actively advancing this planning with the Ministry.

Sunnybrook continues to experience significant occupancy challenges both in critical care and acute care beds and this is despite the forced under-performance in procedural volumes and the reluctance of the population to seek care due to COVID fears. The Government’s investments pre fiscal 2020/21 – Pine Villa, an additional 24 beds at St. John’s Rehab site, and 60 reactivation beds at the Humber Church Street site, continue to
play a vital role in supporting safe care and good patient flow. In fiscal 2020/21 the Ministry also invested in 14 incremental critical care beds and 32 incremental acute care beds. Including those investments, Sunnybrook’s occupancy was 97% and 100.5% in acute care and critical care beds respectively. In addition, there were an average of 18 admitted patients, compared to 21 in fiscal 2019/20, cared for in the Emergency Department, 2 of which were critical care patients. These results are why Sunnybrook continues to advocate for the one time investments made in beds as a result of COVID to be made permanent. This is critical as well for Ontario’s recovery and the catch-up on the backlog of cases that has arisen during COVID.

The chart below reflects that 78.9 per cent (78.2 per cent in fiscal 2019/20) of all funding is used for direct patient care. Also evident in the chart is Sunnybrook’s spend on corporate support, which year over year is consistently around 10 per cent.

Fiscal 2020/2021 - Operating Expenses

In addition, Sunnybrook is regarded as an efficient and effective hospital when benchmarked against peer hospitals. For example, based on the Health Indicator Tool (HIT) (fiscal 2019/20 data):

- The cost per patient day at Sunnybrook was $634 compared to the average cost of $653 at peer teaching hospitals in the province.
- Sunnybrook’s proportion of administrative expenses is 2.5% lower than that of hospitals in the Toronto Central LHIN and 0.3% lower than other Ontario teaching hospitals.

In summary, Sunnybrook remains a fiscally prudent organization as evidenced by consistently being balanced and continuously using the vast majority of its resources in the provision of patient care.
Medical students
The new strategic plan, spanning from 2020 to 2023, provides a vision for a post-pandemic future. This future is marked by high-quality, nimble, personalized education and training and further addresses the psychological needs and well-being of all student learners.

**Enhancing learners’ physical space**

To improve the student experience, Sunnybrook invested $8 million in an education department consolidation and renovation project, with the purpose of centralizing and enhancing resources for all learners. These spaces include a common student lounge, computer lab, seminar rooms, locker room, and an interprofessional student registration centre. In addition to enhancing student space, the scope of the project also includes a renovated simulation centre and library.

**Building education research**

The hospital welcomed its first-ever Education Research Scientist, Csilla Kalocsai, in April 2020, who will develop an independent program of research in an area relevant to Sunnybrook’s education priorities. The scientist will support the organization’s commitment to build capacity and activities to support education research and scholarship broadly through collaborations with education scientists, researchers, clinician investigators, graduate students and learners. This professorship was made possible by the Academic Clinicians’ Management Services.

**Virtual innovation in brain medicine education**

Young physicians are learning about the treatment of common brain disorders in a new way through integrating virtual care in the clinical setting. The Brain Medicine Fellowship allows patients with complex brain disorders to receive care virtually from various experts in a clinical setting. A patient’s initial appointment is with a neurologist and psychiatrist, with access to other brain medicine specialists such as a neurosurgeon or geriatrician, if needed. The health-care team collaborates on patient progress and trainees also benefit from interdisciplinary discussions.
The organization’s scientists continued their work on breakthroughs and innovations to invent the future of health care. This past year, many Sunnybrook Research Institute scientists shifted focus to studies and trials to help combat the global pandemic. Alongside much-needed research for COVID-19, Sunnybrook scientists continued to make ground-breaking discoveries and achievements across all areas of health care.

A rapid research response
In the last year, Sunnybrook researchers across multiple disciplines have come together initiating more than 100 studies related to COVID-19. These studies seek to better understand the virus, manage COVID-19, and propose solutions to challenges posed by the pandemic. Highlights include Canadian Treatments for COVID-19, which is part of the unprecedented World Health Organization Solidarity trial investigating potential treatments for hospitalized COVID-19 patients, as well as Neurocovid, a brain imaging study investigating the neurological impact of the virus. The COVID-19 long-haulers study is another example of pandemic-driven research inquiry, seeking to better define the group of COVID-19 patients experiencing persistent symptoms.

Four new Canada Research Chairs
Four scientists were awarded Canada Research Chairs, the country’s highest research honour. Dr. Isabelle Aubert, a senior scientist in Biological Sciences and the Hurvitz Brain Sciences Research Program, and Dr. Greg Stanisz, a senior scientist in Physical Sciences and the Odette Cancer Research Program, were both recognized with Tier 1 Canada Research Chairs. They will receive $200,000 in funding annually for seven years.

Dr. Harindra Wijeysundera, a senior scientist in Evaluative Clinical Sciences and the Schulich Heart Research Program, and Dr. Hannah Wunsch, a senior scientist in Evaluative Clinical Sciences and the Tory Trauma Research Program, were both awarded Tier 2 Canada Research Chairs and will receive $100,000 annually for five years.

Sunnybrook will be home to Toronto’s first 7-Tesla MRI
A $13.9 million grant from the Canada Foundation for Innovation, made to the University of Toronto, will bring a powerful new MRI scanner to the Sunnybrook Research Institute and scientists across Toronto, as part of a new multi-site collaborative research initiative focused on neuroimmunology and neuroimaging for diseases such as stroke, multiple sclerosis and cancer. The 7T MRI produces images in unprecedented detail, allowing researchers to see areas of the nervous system never seen before with MRI. The 7T has a much stronger magnetic field than commonly used MRIs, increasing the signal and contrast, which generates a higher resolution image, enabling researchers to see clearly defined areas of the brain that were previously grainy or invisible. The machine’s capabilities will open up new opportunities for diagnostics, disease monitoring and personalized treatments. As one of only a few 7T scanners in the country, the 7T will be a driving force for precision medicine at Sunnybrook.

Sunnybrook Research Institute is home to 357 researchers and more than 200 students and trainees across three research platforms and eight specialized research programs.
The pandemic highlighted the significance of delivering safe, seamless and sustainable care under extreme circumstances. Sunnybrook continued its commitment to innovation in quality and patient safety improvements, and continues to lead in the appropriate use of antimicrobials, preventing surgical site infections and transfusion safety. The hospital also began a process to renew its Quality Strategic Plan. The renewed plan elevates specific quality goals of safe, seamless and sustainable care that are key to achieving excellence.

**Quality strategic plan in action**

The three goals of the quality strategic plan – safe, seamless and sustainable care – were evident in multiple areas across the organization. The LTC+ Program, developed in response to the pandemic, seeks to enhance care in long-term care settings while also avoiding unnecessary transfers for residents to acute care. The program features enhanced 24/7 access to general internal medicine and palliative care consults to over 40 long-term care homes in Toronto. Sunnybrook’s Pharmacy and Decision Support began to work to ensure enhanced visibility of essential medications for intubated COVID-19 patients. By observing usage patterns on a daily basis, the team was able to identify pressures before shortages occur, enabling conservation of medications by switching to alternatives to ensure sustained supply for the hospital’s critically ill patients.

**Using Blood Wisely**

Sunnybrook was recognized as a designated Using Blood Wisely hospital after meeting national benchmarks for red blood cell transfusions. Inappropriate transfusion practices are common in hospitals, placing significant strain on Canada’s blood supply and also exposing patients to potential harm. Using Blood Wisely is a national campaign to decrease inappropriate red blood cell transfusion practices in Canada, and symbolizes Sunnybrook’s commitment to red blood cell stewardship and to the continuous pursuit of quality improvement.

**Improving urgent care for vulnerable cancer patients**

A new pilot project tapped the collaborative expertise of physician assistants and medical oncologists, helping patients gain access to same-day care for urgent issues. Sunnybrook’s new Medical Oncology Urgent Care Pilot project expedites care for cancer patients outside of the emergency department. The pilot project has enabled quick assessments of patients, reducing wait times to care.
Across the hospital, Sunnybrook’s interdisciplinary teams approached the challenges of the pandemic with true collaboration and grace under pressure to provide patients with the best possible care.
Nursing and Health Professions

Nursing Resource Teams, comprised of 200-plus nurses who are an essential part of the hospital’s workforce, worked across over 40 units and four campuses. Each resource team nurse undergoes an extensive orientation and education period before they assume responsibility for a broad range of nursing services for patients within their clinical cluster. Individuals also shone, like physiotherapist Vera Fung, who was awarded the Visser-Beutel Inaugural Research Internship to investigate the care of patients with lower limb loss.

Stories from the frontline
The commitment that Sunnybrook’s interprofessional teams provide at the bedside was brought to life outside of the hospital through the media. Clarice Shen, a registered nurse who volunteered to care for the patient with Canada’s first confirmed case of COVID-19 in January 2020, was featured in numerous media outlets. Registered nurses Kathryn Rego, Vicky Boateng, Natacha Hainzelin, Emily Smith, Sheena Solitario, Brenda Mayers, Shauna Tavernier and Daria Gefrerer – to name just a few – provided firsthand stories of what it was like on COVID-19 frontline. Julie Nardi and Ryan Smith, respiratory therapists, shared their perspectives of caring compassionately for COVID-19 patients. With new visitor restrictions amid the pandemic, Brenda Stewart, spiritual care practitioner, spoke about Sunnybrook’s iPad program and the ability to connect families and patients through iPad visits.

Educating Sunnybrook Awards
Displaying a passion for teaching and learning, Estella Tse and Bev Waite were recognized by the 2020 Sunnybrook Excellence in Education Awards. Estella, an occupational therapist in the Tory Trauma Program, was described by her peers and learners as a mentor, role model and “their biggest fan”. Nursing education lead Bev Waite was touted as having a “lifelong enthusiasm for teaching and learning, a remarkable aptitude for mentoring, a commitment to providing ongoing development opportunities for staff and learners and a collaborative nature.”

Expanding team-based models
The pandemic nudged Sunnybrook to further expand its team-based models. The framework supports flexible teams where experienced health care providers work together with others from across professions that may be different than their traditional scope. Through a collaboration with the Ontario Ministry of Health, funding was secured to recruit up to 75 clinical externs and five extern mentor coordinators. An extern is a nursing student enrolled in their 2nd, 3rd, or 4th year of an accredited baccalaureate or diploma nursing program, who provides supportive patient care as a valued member of the interprofessional team.
Sunnybrook evolved to meet the ever-changing demands created by the pandemic, implementing new tactics, resources and initiatives to improve the patient experience.
Improving the Patient Experience

Sunnybrook patients recovering at home from COVID-19 get support virtually

The hospital created COVIDEO, a new resource connecting patients who test positive for COVID-19 at the hospital’s assessment centre with a physician who is available around the clock for questions and concerns. The initiative provides patients with a therapeutic presence, reassurance, supportive care strategies, a monitoring plan and a point of contact for emergencies. COVIDEO also allows for a safe way to bring in the minority of patients who require admission to the hospital. As part of the program, patients and their caregivers also have access to the ID physician on call 24/7 and are encouraged to call when they have any questions or concerns.

Virtual ED

Sunnybrook, like many emergency departments in the Toronto area, saw a decrease in patient visits during the first wave of the pandemic, likely due to patient fears of COVID-19. In response, the Virtual ED was launched, offering same-day virtual appointments with emergency department physicians, aiming to reach patients in their homes so that they do not have to come to the hospital. The Virtual ED also aims to service under-served populations, reduce wait times and improve the patient and family experience.

Promoting positive alternatives to violence

A new program called BRAVE, Breaking the Cycle of Violence with Empathy, enrolled patients treated at Sunnybrook for a gun or stabbing-related injury with the goal of promoting positive alternatives to violence. Developed by the Tory Trauma Program and Sunnybrook’s Centre for Injury Prevention, the initiative aims to reduce retaliation, criminal involvement and re-injury among youth recovering from violence. BRAVE provides a unique opportunity to meet with youth and support them in the hospital and as they return to their communities. A public health approach to violence prevention is used, and teams look at risk factors associated with violent injury, such as limited education, lack of job opportunities, complex post-traumatic stress disorder, and substance misuse, and aims to address those in collaboration with the patient.
Patient, Family and Caregiver Engagement

The pandemic brought about new challenges and opportunities for teams seeking to maintain and deepen engagement with patients, families and caregivers. Visitor restrictions placed a pause on in-person meetings for Patient and Family Advisory Councils, but a shift to virtual engagement enabled teams to connect with ease and speed to patients outside the hospital walls, putting less demand on their time and enabling patient partners to inform our team’s fast-paced crisis response.

Engagement in COVID-19 response

Patient and family partners were engaged in many aspects of the COVID-19 response. Partners provided advice on the development and evolution of Sunnybrook’s visitor restriction policy and community messaging, and helped to shape the iPad program, designed to keep patients virtually connected with their loved ones while in hospital. Partners and community members also informed the development of communication materials for COVID-19 safety protocols for visitors, and public education related to the virus and vaccines.

Research strides

Significant strides were made in the development of a strategy to support patient engagement in research. With funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the hospital’s research teams and patient partners were engaged through surveys, focus groups, interviews and a town hall to advise on the infrastructure required to support meaningful engagement of patients and partners in research. These steps resulted in the development of a digital Patient Engagement in Research hub with information about best practices for engaging partners at all stages during the research cycle. Sunnybrook continued to engage patients and caregivers as partners in research, inviting partners to contribute as members on study teams conducting COVID-19 clinical research as well as research to better understand the patient experience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Patient as educator

Patient engagement in teaching and learning was embedded in the Education Strategic Plan this year as one of five strategic directions. The plan lays the path for partnering with patients and families for the inclusion of their experiences and perspectives in all teaching and learning, including learner development and evaluation, patient education and education research activities. Just one example came from the Tory Trauma Program team, who partnered with youth in the community to re-design the Prevent Alcohol & Risk-Related Trauma in Youth (P.A.R.T.Y.) Program for delivery on a virtual platform. Moving forward, the P.A.R.T.Y. Program IGNITE team will work with youth in the community to co-design virtual reality videos to augment the online learner experience.
This past year brought about an intensified and necessary focus on long-standing issues of racism and inequity in Canada, which was reflected in the health system. Sunnybrook took concrete steps to further the organization’s commitment to addressing systemic racism, and ensure an inclusiveness for staff, partners, volunteers, patients, their families and communities.

The President’s Anti-Racism Task Force

The President’s Anti-Racism Task Force was established in 2020 to focus on producing tangible and visible results that will have a broad impact. The taskforce has begun the work of developing and implementing an action plan that is aligned with the anti-racism work being led by Ontario Health, Toronto Academic Health Science Network and the University of Toronto.

Black History Month

Black History Month was formally recognized and celebrated for the first time in February 2021. The President’s Anti-Racism Taskforce invited staff, students and volunteers to engage in celebration, learning and reflection by taking part in events and activities throughout the month. Highlights included a staff portrait series featuring members of Team Sunnybrook, an online conversation focused on the impacts and implications of COVID-19 for Black Communities in Ontario, and an online Fireside Chat featuring Dr. Andy Smith and Dr. Notisha Massaquoi discussing racism in health care and the role of the Black family in inventing the future of health care.

Partnerships with Indigenous health leaders

Over the past year, Sunnybrook continued to collaborate with the Indigenous Cancer Program of Ontario. A monthly sharing circle called Honouring the Journey of Wellbeing aimed to improve the care of Indigenous patients, families and staff by building meaningful relationships through cultural gatherings and learning opportunities. Sunnybrook also collaborated with partners from Seventh Generation Midwives of Toronto and Auduzhe Mino Nessewinong, an Indigenous-led COVID-19 assessment and testing centre, to host community-led vaccine clinics for Indigenous adults at the hospital’s vaccination clinic.

Injury is NOT Equal

The Tory Trauma program launched “Injury is NOT Equal” — an awareness campaign and podcast highlighting the intersection between location, social economic status, identity, gender and more, contributing to health inequities that directly impact injury and health outcomes.

Anti-Racism and Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
Partnerships and System Improvement

Sunnybrook continued to prioritize maintaining and building new relationships with community care providers. The organization supported the work of the North Toronto Ontario Health Team as it strengthened ties with family physicians and other primary care providers, improving coordinated and seamless patient care. The heart of Sunnybrook’s focus on partnerships and system improvement focused on creating pathways of care for patients extending into the community.

Support for congregate care outbreaks
As COVID-19 in many long-term care homes across the province became critical, Sunnybrook’s Infection Prevention and Control team and many other members of the hospital’s interdisciplinary teams stepped in to provide support. The response included long-term care homes, retirement homes and other congregate care settings, and drew on every area of expertise, from environmental services and personal support workers to registered practical nurses, registered nurses and physicians. Efforts spanned daily on-site support to weekly teleconferences and town halls to share infection prevention and control expertise with community partners.

Breaking down barriers to flu vaccination
Influenza season prompted the North Toronto Ontario Health Team and Sunnybrook’s Department of Family and Community Medicine to think outside of the box on how to best vaccinate as many community members as possible amid a pandemic. A drive-through vaccination clinic vaccinated 2,300 community members and door-to-door flu shot clinics at Toronto Community Housing provided hundreds of high-risk seniors with the flu vaccine.

Schulich Heart Program continues integration with Michael Garron
Sunnybrook continued to expand its collaboration with Michael Garron Hospital to ensure access to high quality services for all residents in the hospitals’ shared communities. The Ministry of Health approved an integrated Percutaneous Coronary Intervention (angioplasty with stent) Program. Through the integration, Sunnybrook has taken on more advanced cases such as TAVI by transferring a proportion of its angioplasty cases to Michael Garron. The approach allows Michael Garron to offer the service closer to home for its patients in the east end of Toronto. Over the last year, another initiative between the two hospitals prioritized timely vascular assessment for patients with diabetic foot ulcers and peripheral artery disease, with a goal of reducing the rate of non-traumatic lower-limb amputation in Ontario.
A highlight of the last year was the development of the COVID-19 digital hub, available at sunnybrook.ca/COVID19.

This created a place where patients and community stakeholders can find detailed information about Sunnybrook’s response to COVID-19, visitor policies, research and general information about the virus and how it spreads. In early 2021, the hub was expanded to include information about the vaccine and how to book a vaccine appointment at Sunnybrook. The COVID-19 digital hub has been visited over 1.1 million times between March 2020 and March 2021.
Online Communication and Social Media

Sunnynet’s role in pandemic communication

The Digital and Visual Communications team, in partnership with Communications and Stakeholder Relations, developed and continue to manage Sunnybrook’s internal digital COVID-19 hub on Sunnynet (the hospital’s Intranet). The section was launched on January 25, 2020, when the first COVID-19 patient was confirmed at Sunnybrook. Working closely with hospital teams, the resource includes up-to-date information for staff, including direction on appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) usage, signage and resources, frequently asked questions, travel and testing, corporate updates – including the management of the COVID-19 Virtual Town Halls – and more. The team also built a COVID-19 vaccine booking tool for staff.

Social media channels thrive

Looking back at 2020, Sunnybrook generated an unprecedented amount of attention and engagement through the digital content created and shared on Sunnybrook’s social media channels. The result was increased awareness about how Team Sunnybrook is responding to the COVID-19 pandemic – from research to the frontlines. These stories are reaching a larger audience than ever before. In 2020-21, the digital team responded to an overwhelming number of messages from the public, including many messages of support and questions about visiting the hospital, accessing care in a pandemic, and obtaining appointments at our COVID-19 Assessment Centre and Vaccine Clinic.

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A closer look at Instagram

Sunnybrook’s fastest growing social media channel is Instagram, and it’s also the organization’s youngest audience. About 50 per cent of Sunnybrook’s Instagram audience is under the age of 35. Through Instagram, the hospital shares:

- Interactive Q&As with experts
- Staff profiles
- Health information slideshows

Video storytelling

Sunnybrook continues to lead the way among Canadian health care organizations in digital video. The hospital’s videos have been viewed over 31 million times. As of March 2021, the organization has more than 78,000 YouTube subscribers – far more than any adult hospital in Canada and even more than many established Canadian brands. This high number of subscribers speaks to the high quality of Sunnybrook’s video content, with community members signing up to receive notifications whenever new content is posted.
With the arrival of COVID-19, it became clear the rapid expansion and adoption of virtual care had the potential to become one of the biggest transformations in health care delivery in decades. Sunnybrook’s success over the past year was the result of the quick and creative thinking from the organization’s frontline teams who embraced technology and pivoted quickly to new approaches in care. These efforts allowed the hospital to continue to care for patients safely and efficiently from a distance. A highlight was the creation of the Digital and Virtual Care Taskforce, which will develop a vision for the delivery of equitable and efficient digitally integrated care.

Virtual care in action

Virtual care is a term broadly encompassing all the ways health care providers remotely interact with their patients such as telemedicine, eVisits and online scheduling. In most clinical areas, patients identified as appropriate are given the option to attend subsequent follow-up visits virtually from their own home. Dr. Ilana Halperin, endocrinologist and co-chair of the Digital and Virtual Care Taskforce says, “My patients love it. Connecting with patients through virtual visits is so efficient, especially for those that require high frequency but low touch interactions. The beauty of home video visits means they can be anywhere: at home, at work...in their backyards.”

Partnership expands and enhances MyChart

The Ontario Medical Association and Sunnybrook joined efforts to enhance MyChart through the expansion of the support call centre and by enabling third-party primary care services such as sick notes and prescription renewals. MyChart, a secure online platform that supports access to medical and personal records, resources and information, is currently used by 625,000 patients in more than 70 Ontario hospitals and labs. The platform enables patients to be more involved with their own health care, move between providers and self-monitor from home.

Connecting patients with local care

Sunnybrook partnered with Lumino Health to provide additional support for patients connecting with local care providers following surgery or procedures. The partnership leverages the hospital’s digital care pathways, which walk patients through their journey from admission to the time they leave the hospital, providing tips and resources along the way. Lumino Health’s Provider Search is now included on the website to help make the transition from hospital to home as smooth as possible by connecting patients to the support they need, virtually or close to home.
Spotlight on 2020-21

RBC
Race for the Kids
Team Sunnybrook played an important part of this success by raising critical funds through initiatives like the staff 50/50 lottery and the RBC Race for the Kids. In 2020, the Race moved to a virtual format and successfully raised $2.1 million for Sunnybrook’s Family Navigation Project. The Foundation also welcomed Kelly Cole as its new President & CEO and recognized eight years of leadership from Dr. Jon S. Dellandrea, C.M. Fundraising for Sunnybrook’s top priority, the Garry Hurvitz Brain Sciences Centre, has sustained momentum with construction of the building now underway.

**Community response to COVID-19**

Thanks to a groundswell of contributions toward Sunnybrook’s COVID-19 efforts, with $7.2 million raised to date, donor generosity has impacted research, staff wellness and patient comfort during the pandemic. Supported in part by donors, Sunnybrook has led more than 100 COVID-related studies to understand the virus, its wide-ranging effects and treatment options. Staff well-being has also benefited from donor contributions such as personal protective equipment, catered meals and Team Sunnybrook sweatshirts for all staff. With patient comfort in mind, donors have contributed hundreds of iPads to connect patients with loved ones while in hospital.

**Sunnybrook Foundation continues to lead strong fundraising efforts in support of Sunnybrook’s strategic priorities. A community of over 74,000 donors contributed a remarkable $72 million in the past year.**

**An exciting step for Alzheimer’s and dementia research**

A lead gift of $10 million from an anonymous local donor enabled Sunnybrook to establish the Dr. Sandra Black Centre for Brain Resilience and Recovery. With world-renowned neurologist Dr. Sandra Black at its helm, the new Centre will unite Sunnybrook’s top dementia experts to prevent mental decline and promote brain recovery. Specifically, the Centre will focus on the critical relationship between the brain’s microvasculature – the complex network of small blood vessels – and dementia. The Foundation is now seeking to raise the remaining $20 million needed to sustain the Centre’s research activities.

**Resilience and Recovery.** With world-renowned neurologist Dr. Sandra Black at its helm, the new Centre will unite Sunnybrook’s top dementia experts to prevent mental decline and promote brain recovery. Specifically, the Centre will focus on the critical relationship between the brain’s microvasculature – the complex network of small blood vessels – and dementia. The Foundation is now seeking to raise the remaining $20 million needed to sustain the Centre’s research activities.

**Progress on Sunnybrook’s first hybrid operating room**

Sunnybrook’s new hybrid operating room will save precious time for patients who require multiple complex surgeries. With three times the functionality of a standard operating room, the hybrid design will allow multidisciplinary teams to work alongside each other to provide life-saving trauma, cardiac and neurosurgical care. The Foundation reached the fundraising target for the hybrid OR, thanks in large part to a notable $4.5-million gift from Blake Goldring, C.M., former Chair of Sunnybrook’s Board of Directors. Construction of the new operating room is underway.

**World leader in focused ultrasound**

The $33-million Weston Family Focused Ultrasound Initiative, launched with a landmark $16.7-million gift from The Weston Family Foundation, will accelerate the development of a powerful new focused ultrasound device to enable the personalized treatment of brain disorders. This initiative will bring this breakthrough technology to patients with the most challenging brain disorders, including Alzheimer’s disease, brain cancer and ALS.
The first-of-its-kind study demonstrated MRI-guided focused ultrasound technology can improve the detection of brain cancer biomarkers with the temporary opening of the blood-brain barrier to aid a liquid biopsy. The research team anticipates this will become an established way to detect and monitor brain tumours frequently, which cannot be done with invasive approaches.

**Mitral valve repair expands treatment options for patients**

A team of cardiologists and cardiac surgeons at Sunnybrook implanted a specialized mitral valve repair ring through a catheter, giving hope to patients who otherwise would be out of treatment options. Mitral regurgitation, a common heart disease as people age, occurs when the mitral valve no longer closes properly. Blood flows backwards into the upper heart chamber and patients find themselves out of breath during normal activities. The new approach presents another option for patients who are older with other medical complications, helping them to avoid open heart surgery.

**New approach for prostate cancer care**

A new trial is looking at customizing and personalizing radiation therapy for patients with prostate cancer. The EARTH trial combines just one session of brachytherapy and one session of stereotactic ablative body radiotherapy. Brachytherapy involves delivering a high-dose of radiation internally, directly to the prostate and stereotactic ablative body radiotherapy is a high-precision, external beam radiation treatment. During the trial, patients will undergo extensive imaging to measure how much of the tumour cells died after the first treatment.
Focused ultrasound
**Focused ultrasound and Parkinson’s disease**

In a world-first clinical trial, a team of researchers from Sunnybrook and University Health Network are using focused ultrasound technology to deliver a therapy directly to affected brain regions in patients with Parkinson’s disease. Parkinson’s is a brain disorder that causes tremor, rigidity, slow movement and numerous other disabling symptoms. Researchers are using low intensity MRI-guided focused ultrasound to open the blood-brain barrier, which protects the brain from toxins and also blocks potentially helpful medications. Study researchers are investigating the delivery of an enzyme to a key structure in the brain related to movement.

**Treating Canadians who have experienced traumatic events**

A clinical trial investigating deep brain stimulation for treatment-resistant post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has had a promising start. Deep brain stimulation involves implanting electrodes that are connected to a small device, like a pacemaker, which send electrical pulses to help regulate abnormal activity occurring in a specific brain pathway. Up to a third of patients diagnosed with PTSD do not respond to conventional treatments such as psychotherapy and medication, which is known as treatment-resistant PTSD. The first patient, Serena Kelly, says:

“My quality of life has improved dramatically…intrusive thoughts and images no longer haunt or keep me awake at night. After decades of avoiding sights and sounds that trigger panic or fear, I am now able to face them directly.”
In order to balance, Sunnybrook will require a significant investment by the Government of Ontario to close the gap and the Government’s continued support for COVID incremental cost reimbursement plus funding for lost Ministry and non-Ministry revenues. In March 2021 the provincial budget identified moneys for ongoing COVID support and a 3% investment for usual operations. However, no funding letters have been received and therefore, it is unknown whether Sunnybrook will be allocated sufficient funding to effect a balanced budget. It is imperative to avoid wave 4 and if so, and as hospital operations return to normal, Management will need to re-assess the steps required to identify and close the remaining fiscal shortfall and it recognizes that doing so will be challenging.

In spite of the tumult of the pandemic, Sunnybrook has still been able to develop a strategic plan that charts a path forward to 2025. In this plan, we are taking the next step on the journey we began with our previous plan (2018-21) and are continuing to work within the framework of our four main Strategic Directions.

We continue to live our dual mandate of being a hospital for our North Toronto community and as a regional centre that provides complex care when it matters most for all Ontarians. Our vision to invent the future of health care remains highly relevant and is notable throughout the plan. Specifically, our passion for innovation through personalized and precise treatments is fundamental in our drive to continually improve patient care. This work, coupled with a renewed focus on the how we contribute to a larger, integrated system with our community partners through the North Toronto Ontario Health Team is expected to contribute to bending the cost curve for the health system in Ontario and maximizing value for our patients.