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## RVH provides training to support people facing mental health issues

Royal Victoria Regional Health Centre (RVH) recently began offering Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training to its staff so they can better identify and support anyone who may have, or be developing, a mental health problem. The training focuses on recognizing signs and symptoms of many types of mental illness and what assistance is available, both within the health centre and the community.

“As healthcare providers we know all about physical first aid, now we are finding out the importance of mental health first aid (MHFA) and training,” says Valerie Smith, chief transformation officer. “Just as physical first aid is administered to an injured person before medical treatment can be obtained, MHFA is given until appropriate treatment is found or until the crisis is resolved. It also teaches us to recognize the signs and symptoms of common mental health problems and to refer people to appropriate supports.”

The training not only provides an overview of mental health and addictions but addresses the stigma associated with mental illness. While it does not train people to be therapists, counselors, or mental health professionals, the training does provide a better understanding of mental illness, how to identify it and what resources are available. RVH’s focus on mental health is aligned with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care’s Patients First: Action Plan for Health Care. The action plan, released earlier this week, commits to providing the right care for mental health and addiction and expanding mental health programs in schools and the workplace to help people deal with challenges and recognize when they need help.

“Having worked in the Mental Health and Addiction field for the past 20 years, I am very pleased to see this course being offered at RVH,” says Angela McCuaig, course instructor and manager of Mental Health and Addictions. “Mental health problems are often not recognized, talked about or treated in the same manner as physical health problems and yet they can have significant impact on individuals, families, workplaces and the community. Statistics tell us that one in five Canadians experience a mental health problem every year, but many are not well informed about how to recognize the symptoms and provide appropriate assistance.”

### **Mental Health and the Workplace Facts**

- One in five Ontarians will experience a mental health problem during their lifetime
- Mental health problems account for 30 per cent of disability claims and 70 per cent of the total costs of disability claims
- Only 34 per cent of employees report having easy access to services and tools at work to help with mental health issues
- 35 million days are lost each year due to mental health
- \$50 billion is lost in productivity each year due to mental illness in the Canadian labour force
- The stigma associated with mental health problems often hinders employees from seeking appropriate help for themselves or others

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About RVH:

RVH is a regional health centre in Barrie, Ontario, located 80 kilometres north of Toronto. As the largest hospital in the region of Simcoe Muskoka, RVH's team of over 350 physicians, 2,500 employees and 850 volunteers provides exceptional care and specialty services to almost half a million residents, including cancer care, stroke services, orthopedics, intensive care, mental health and interventional radiology. RVH is focused on delivering safe, high quality care that puts patients and their families first. For more information visit [www.rvh.on.ca](http://www.rvh.on.ca)

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