

'I WOULD HAVE BEEN DEAD'

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MUSKOKA - Adam Saunders is thanking a Muskoka Community Health Hub for saving his life.

"We work pretty much out in the middle of nowhere - as far into the woods in the most deserted place on a lake - and that's where we go because that's where big cottages are," said the stonemason and hardscapes worker in a video testimonial produced by Collective Noun for a final evaluation and sustainability report to the province on the three-year health hub demonstration project. "We were working out on Kawagama Lake doing a fireplace. I was kind of tired - I had a long weekend - and I drank a Red Bull, which is something I hadn't done in a long time. I usually just drink coffee."

He said his hands then started to itch. And the itch soon spread to his legs, chest and face. An alarmed colleague eventually told him to look in a mirror.

"My face was completely swollen. Only my one eye was actually open. My other eye was shut. And my eyebrows were swollen out," he said.

He and his colleague jumped in a truck and sped down a dirt road he described as more of a "goat path, a terrible trail," and by the time they reached Dorset he could feel his lungs start to close.

They were still more than half an hour away from the Huntsville hospital.

But then his colleague



Collective Noun/Photo

Adam Saunders, one of the Muskoka Community Health Hub patients who participated in a video testimonial as part of a final evaluation and sustainability report on the hubs to the province, says an allergic reaction might have ended his life, if not for the immediate care he received at the Dorset Community Health Hub.



Alison Brownlee/Metroland

Donna Kearney, Muskoka Community Health Hub project co-ordinator, the hubs.

mentioned the Dorset Community Health Hub, which was one of four hubs operating across the region as part of the Muskoka Community Health Hubs dem-

"I highly recommend they keep funding something like this and keep the doors open because I wouldn't be sitting here."

- Adam Saunders, patient

onstration project supported by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and the pair decided to stop for help.

Saunders said within moments he was seen, assessed, shot with adrenalin and felt his lungs reopen.

"I hate to think what would have happened if I tried for Huntsville," he said. "I would have been dead."

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He was one of four patients to participate in the video testimonials. Other patients praised patient-centred care, palliative support, mental health support, health care close to home and more offered at the nurse practitioner-led hubs.

Cheryl Faber, director of community services programs and Muskoka Health Link for the District of Muskoka, told district council in December the demonstration project would come to an end in August 2018, and urged council to support a call for provincial permanent base funding for the hubs into the future.

"The health hubs have been an overwhelming success due to the partnership and collaboration behind the design," said Faber. "This came from the foresight of district council to start looking at a made-in-Muskoka solution for access to primary care."

The demonstration project launched through Muskoka Community Health Link, in partnership with the District of Muskoka, Cottage Country Family Health Team, Algonquin Family Health Team and the Wahta Health Department, in 2015.

The Dorset, Port Carling and Wahta health hubs, as well as a mobile hub, aimed to increase access to primary care and other community programs and services in rural and remote communities.

More than 1,800 patients registered for primary care

through the hubs, which also saw more than 15,000 patient visits.

The province provided roughly \$900,000 annually in funding for the hubs.

Lake of Bays Mayor Bob Young praised the hubs, as did other council members.

"The health hub is probably the single greatest thing to hit the Dorset community in its recent history," said Young. "It has helped so many people already and it is a wonderful site staffed by excellent people."

But he, as others, were adamant the province would need to increase funding to cover the facilities operating costs otherwise funded by the area municipalities and donors.

He noted his township paid for roughly \$34,000 in facilities costs, such as propane and maintenance, annually.

"The health hubs have to be sustainable," he said. "To have an open-ended liability on the municipality to fund shortages in operating costs is just untenable."

Muskoka Lakes Mayor Don Furniss later argued more funding might also be needed for additional nurse practitioners and staff, as the popularity of the hubs continued. More than 500 patients were registered in Port Carling alone.

Council later endorsed an amended motion that called for permanent provincial funding to cover all hub operating costs at its meeting in January.

Donna Kearney, Muskoka Community Health Hub project co-ordinator, later noted she hoped to hear from the province before the end of March.



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