

October 28, 2022

As most have heard, the hospital has been bursting at the seams for weeks. Not only are the ED and the wards are overflowing, but the **Pediatric Intensive Care Unit (PICU)** has been experiencing unprecedented volumes and acuity levels. Our PICU is funded for 18 beds. Occupancy has recently been in the range of 19-22 critically ill children. The MCH is not alone in this. All four children's hospitals in Quebec are experiencing similar challenges. Indeed the same phenomenon is playing out in children's hospitals across North America. This is not comforting. Our PICU routinely cooperates with the PICU at Ste. Justine, as well as the PICUs in Sherbrooke and Quebec City, to ensure safe care for the sickest children. The current situation is forcing our PICU to accept admissions even when already full. Several of our PICU rooms required modification to accommodate two patients, despite having been designed as single rooms.

The current surge is related to respiratory viruses that are normally seen February to April. The normal seasonal cycle of viral illnesses has been disrupted by COVID and the impacts of repeated lockdowns. It is not possible to predict what will happen next.

Despite these major, unprecedented challenges, the PICU team has displayed their characteristic grace under pressure, providing top quality care to very sick children. At the best of times, the PICU can be a very stressful environment with lots happening all at once. In recent weeks, this stress has been amplified. Under the steady leadership of Dr. Saleem Razack, the intensivists have led their teams admirably, doubling up on physician coverage on most days. The Nurse Resource Manager, Sarah Shea, has somehow managed to keep staffing at 30-40% higher than usual levels with the support of the PICU nursing team. The RTs, who have been grappling with serious staffing shortages for years, continue to display the highest levels of caring and professionalism. The fellows, advanced practice nurse, and residents have also stepped up to get the job done, showing flexibility and resilience.

The incredible spirit, devotion, and skill of the entire PICU team has kept things running smoothly. It is reassuring to know they are there when we need them. Ron would have been so proud of this team.

Have a good weekend.

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