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Real-Time Wait Time Website Wins National Innovation Prize

November 13, 2014 – Kitchener and Toronto, Ontario

A trip to the emergency department (ED) is never fun, but for Kitchener-Waterloo residents the wait time is at least more predictable.

With a growing number of patients showing up in the hospital ED, the top question patients ask when visiting is "How long will I wait?", St. Mary's General Hospital in Kitchener turned to technology to give residents more accurate information about how long they will wait to see a doctor.

The real-time ED wait time clock was developed in conjunction with the Waterloo Region technology company, Oculys™, and last night was named one of the six most innovative projects of 2014 by The Information Technology Association of Canada, the nation's ICT industry association.

The hospital was presented the prestigious Ingenious Award which recognizes excellence in the innovative use of information and communication technology. The project was one of two winners in the Large Public Sector category.

The website displays a clock offering a real-time estimate of the ED wait time at St. Mary's General Hospital. With the wait time explained in easy to understand language and an accessible format, patients can make informed choices about how, when and where to seek care. The website includes:

- current estimated wait times to see a physician or nurse practitioner in the ED from the time of triage;
- the number of people waiting and the number being treated in the ED;
- a projection of wait times over the next six hours in the emergency department based on past trends;
- a list of alternatives to emergency department care.

The success of the technology prompted nearby Grand River Hospital in Kitchener to launch its own real-time wait time website, also powered by Oculys. Kitchener-Waterloo is the first and only region in Ontario where patients have convenient access to real-time Emergency Department wait times at two local hospitals.

Quick Facts

- Following the launch of the Wait Time Website, the St. Mary's General Hospital ED saw a 12% reduction in the volume of CTAS 4 and 5 patients (those who are less sick). The trend remains consistent.
- More than 4,000 people refer to the website clock each month
- The website estimated wait time has been shown to be more than 90 per cent accurate.
- The Information Technology Association of Canada is the voice of the ITC sector in Canada. It has been operating the Ingenious Awards since 2011.
- The Ingenious Awards Program was designed to showcase the accomplishments effort of innovative Canadian organizations that use technology to build competitive enterprises and strengthen the Canadian economy.
- The Information and Communications Technology sector creates one million direct and indirect jobs and generates $155 billion in annual revenue

Quotes

"When people think about technology in a heath care setting they tend to think about sophisticated scanning equipment and monitoring devices. St. Mary's General's wait- time website clearly shows the technology is at play in all levels of the system, stretching now to pre-arrival. We hope that recognizing this innovation serves as a reminder that there are virtually no limits to the number of positive ways ICT can improve our health care delivery system."

-Karna Gupta, President and CEO, Information Technology Association of Canada

"When we first launched this website we weren't quite sure what to expect. We didn't know if people would use it. We were pleasantly surprised when, right from the beginning thousands of people began accessing the site each month. When we talked to those who were using the site they said how much they appreciated knowing what to expect. It helped them make informed decisions about when to come to the ED or even to decide not to come to the ED and instead seek care from the family physician or go to an urgent care facility. "

- St. Mary's General Hospital President Don Shilton.

"The Oculys Real-Time ED Wait-Time clock reflects the combined efforts of St. Mary's Hospital, University of Waterloo Professor and Oculys Chief Scientist Kenneth McKay , and the Oculys team led by Charlie Farkas. Being recognized by ITAC validates our collaborative approach to innovative technology and reinforces our commitment to actively participate in transformative solutions. Our wait-time clock accuracy is unprecedented and we are very proud of this award. Thanks to St. Mary's for committing to their vision and letting us turn it into a reality."

- Franck Hivert, President and CEO, Oculys Health Informatics Inc.

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