



News Release

For Immediate Release

December 6, 2010

EMERGENCY-ROOM WAIT TIMES STILL TOO LONG: AUDITOR GENERAL

(TORONTO) Emergency departments in Ontario hospitals are not yet meeting the province's targets for wait times despite \$200 million in additional funding over the last two years, Auditor General Jim McCarter says in his *2010 Annual Report*, released today.

"Overcrowding and delays in emergency rooms continue to be an issue often because hospitals have problems freeing up in-patient beds," McCarter said after his Report was tabled. "When there are no beds for new admissions, patients have to wait in emergency rooms, and that causes overcrowding and delays."

McCarter, who also examined the related subject of hospital procedures for the timely discharge of patients, added that, "despite evidence showing that hospitals are working hard to reduce wait times, no significant province-wide progress has been made for patients with more serious conditions."

Following are some of the Auditor's significant findings:

- Emergency wait times for patients with serious conditions sometimes reached 12 or more hours—significantly longer than the province's eight-hour target.
- Emergency patients who needed to be admitted to hospital waited an average of about 10 hours for an in-patient bed, and some waited 26 hours or more. These delays often occurred because empty beds had not been identified or because vacant hospital rooms had not been cleaned.
- Guidelines used in Ontario emergency departments recommend that patients be triaged within 10 to 15 minutes of arrival, but some patients waited for more than an hour.
- Many hospitals said limited availability of on-site specialists and diagnostic services affects the hospitals' ability to treat emergency patients quickly.
- Some hospitals have trouble finding staff to fill nursing schedules, especially on nights, weekends, and holidays. A number of emergency department nurses consistently worked significant amounts of overtime or took extra shifts, leading to additional costs, as well as an increased risk of staff burnout.

-30-

For more information, please contact:

Jim McCarter
Auditor General
(416) 327-1326

Andréa Vanasse/Joël Ruimy
Communications
(416) 327-2336