New breed of doctor joins St. Joe’s rehab team

By Joanne Shuttleworth

GUELPH — A new type of doctor joined the rehabilitation team at St. Joseph's Health Centre, a move that will have better outcomes for patients and brings Guelph to best practice in terms of stroke recovery.

Marianne Walker, chief executive officer of St. Joe's, was tasked by the Waterloo Wellington Local Health Integration Network to look at the stroke strategy in the region and review rehabilitation services.

That review identified the need for six physiatrists — one in Guelph, one in Cambridge and four in Kitchener.

Dr. John Patcai joined St. Joe's in early January. He also has privileges at Guelph General Hospital.

"Rehabilitation is a team effort; now we have a complete team," Walker said in an interview. "We're thrilled he was interested in St. Joe's."

A physiatrist is a physician with a specialty in physical medicine and rehabilitation.

Their expertise is in restoring optimal function to muscles, bones, tissues and the nervous system.

Patcai will deal mostly with stroke and amputee in-patients in the rehab unit at St. Joe's. He'll assist the acute care team at Guelph General once a stroke patient has been stabilized, and the Community Care Access Centre case manager in discharging patients.

Patcai worked at St. John's Rehab in Toronto and at Sunnybrook hospital when the two merged, so he has much experience working with patients in hospital.

But he's looking forward to offering a continuum of care in Guelph, he said.

"I'll have much better opportunity to see a patient before they come to St. Joe's, to follow their progress here and then after they go home. It's a good set up," he said.
The rehab team also includes physiotherapists, occupational therapists, social workers, speech therapists, nurses, other physicians, and the patient.

They sit together and discuss the patient's condition, chances for recovery and work out a plan to get there.

"We want to eliminate the deficit, whatever it is," Patcai said. "So we push a stroke patient to walk again, set targets to regain their speech. But sometimes recovery is not possible. Then we help them learn to live with it.

"It's not easy for the patient. There's usually a strong, emotional reaction."

The team approach is an aspect of his specialty he particularly enjoys, he said.

"I like the idea that we can look at a problem and figure out a solution. The patient is part of the team and together we work on goals. Here we expect them to get well and then get on with their lives," Patcai said.