

# Media Release

Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Walking Together for Mental Illness Awareness

(Thunder Bay, ON – October 6, 2015) Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre (TBRHSC) staff, patients and partners are walking together to help raise awareness and reduce stigma surrounding mental health and addictions. The activity is held in honour of Mental Illness Awareness Week (Oct. 4 – Oct. 10),

“Mental illness and addiction are so prevalent in Canada, but people don’t like to talk about it,” explained Heather Kozak, Psychological Associate, Community Mental Health, and Mental Illness Awareness Committee Chair, TBRHSC. “That’s why Mental Illness Awareness Week is such an important initiative. Our Mental Illness Awareness Walk and other activities throughout the week spark a much needed dialogue and help reduce the stigma that surrounds mental health and addictions in our community.”

Mental health is one of five strategic directions in TBRHSC’s Strategic Plan 2020. “We are committed to adopting attitudes and behaviours that recognize mental health as an integral part of the delivery of comprehensive acute care services, which includes increasing the overall knowledge and competency of all staff,” said Dr. Mark Henderson, Executive Vice President, Patient Services. “By prioritizing mental health services within TBRHSC, we hope to not only ensure that our mental health patients are satisfied, but that we set an example in our community as an inclusive and stigma-free environment.”

Dawn Betts knows first-hand how important quality mental health care is. “Mental illness is so common. It doesn’t discriminate - it can impact anyone at any time,” she said. “As someone who has been a consumer of the system, I’m so pleased to see that the Health Sciences Centre is prioritizing mental health and working hard to improve services to patients and families. By raising awareness and working to eliminate stigma, I’m hopeful that more people will be comfortable accessing treatment and sharing their stories.”

In addition to the Mental Illness Awareness Walk, TBRHSC also hosted an educational exhibition, which featured over 20 booths and displays of both internal and community mental health programs and services. Staff education activities and lunch & learns are also planned throughout the week to support Health Sciences Centre staff to be educated and comfortable in addressing the mental health concerns of their patients and families. Funding for all activities was generously provided by community donors.

“When our Board reviewed grant requests last year, we were convinced that funding for both Mental Illness Awareness Week and Mental Health Awareness Week was of tremendous importance, considering that at least 1 in 5 Canadians will develop some form of mental illness in their lifetime,” said Barry Streib, Director, Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Foundation. “The reality is that without donors in our community, we wouldn’t have been able to support this important initiative. It’s donors who are the missing piece that ensure funding for the events of this week is possible and allow us to better understand mental illness so we can care for our families and friends who need our help.”

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#### **Healthy Together**

Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre (TBRHSC), a 375-bed acute care facility, is a national leader in Patient and Family Centred Care. As the tertiary care provider in Northwestern Ontario, TBRHSC provides comprehensive services to a population of over 250,000 residents in a region the size of France.

Effectively addressing the healthcare needs of patients and families has earned TBRHSC both Innovation Awards and Leading Practice Designations.

As an academic health sciences centre, TBRHSC is committed to teaching the next generation of healthcare providers and advancing medical research. Patients benefit from interprofessional teams of dedicated healthcare providers and access to leading-edge medical equipment and clinical trials.