

# Province downloaded anti-venom cost to hospitals

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FREE PRESS SPECIAL

With the unexpected high number of Massasauga Rattlesnake bites last week, small hospitals are realizing the high cost of yet another provincial download. Up to \$90,000 will have to be budgeted to cover the cost of anti-venom in the coming year.

Application for funding assistance has been made by Parry Sound General Hospital to cover the cost of the product.

The costly anti-venom serum which used to be made in Canada and provided cost free through the provincial government, now comes from Wales at a cost of \$1,000 US and close to \$1,800 Canadian. With the recent change of suppliers, came the news that Crofab - a new product, will not be covered by the ministry, so costs will fall back

onto individual user hospitals. This presents a major budget increase for Huronia District Hospital in Midland and Parry Sound General, two key locations for snake anti-venom for the Georgian Bay area.

"This is certainly a major cost factor and huge factor, in our budget. We would have to budget about \$90,000 per year," said Beverly Hall director of critical care for Parry Sound General Hospital.

"We have contacted the ministry to ask for assistance and have requested that Parry Sound be designated as a depot for distributing the anti-venom. We could do research on snake bites, perfect the protocol and gather data. Currently Parry Sound is the number one user of the snake anti-venom and Midland is a regular user. All of the other user hospitals have endorsed the idea that Parry Sound become a depot and the ver-

bal response from the ministry has been positive."

Hall said the plan went into action last week after Parry Sound treated three Massasauga Rattle bites and Midland treated one. Both hospitals treated bites prior, Midland had one on July 3 and Parry Sound a total of six altogether this season. Hall said the hospital was close to a crisis last week after treating the third bite victim and they used up all their anti-venom. They had ordered a second supply, but it was held up in customs for 24 hours, during which time a network was set up to obtain the serum from other hospitals if an emergency occurred. Hall said this situation could be eliminated with one location acting as a depot and carrying the main supply for other locations.

"Application for funding from the province will help with cost of the drug and acting as a supply

depot."

Hall said the new anti-venom presents both positives and negatives, but more positives for the patient.

Crofab is a much more effective treatment for the poisonous snake bite as it produced from cow protein and does not seem to have as severe of side effects on the patient.

The old product was produced from horse serums and had a higher rate of serious side effects for the patient.

Another positive of the Crofab is there is less pain for the patient while the serum is neutralizing the effect of the venom in the blood stream and the swelling is usually gone in two to three days.

"The old anti-venom only had to be administered once - various quantities at one time. The downside to Crofab is we appear to use more of it than the previous product. In our experience, the patient

has to come for two or three sessions, to have their blood tested and more anti-venom administered," said Hall.

"The snake venom effect is to alter the clotting ability of the blood. We have to measure the clotting profile of the patients to let us know whether or not they need more anti-venom. We instruct the patients to come back for the testing."

While the Massasauga Rattlesnake has been in the media frequently in the past month, Hall cautions the snake is still an endangered species and not an aggressive. The number of bites experienced so far is not abnormal.

"All bites treated this year at the Parry Sound Hospital have been from someone stepping on a snake," she said.

"We are lucky with the Massasauga Rattler that we have lots of time to treat a bite, the venom is very slow acting."

Teen girl survives bite, still under treatment