

Pembroke Regional Hospital Welcomes Third Psychiatrist

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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PEMBROKE – The Pembroke Regional Hospital is pleased to welcome Dr. Valentine Okechukwu, a psychiatrist whose arrival has enabled an increase in assessment and followup psychiatric services for outpatients in Renfrew County and the Pontiac.

“Dr. Okechukwu is a hard-working, collegial and much-welcomed addition to the team whose experience in both outpatient and inpatient psychiatry settings has allowed him to integrate easily into our mental health program here in Pembroke,” said Dr. Michael Ferri Chief of Psychiatry at Pembroke Regional Hospital.

Dr. Okechukwu joins Dr. Ferri and Dr. Nishka Vijay in the hospital’s Psychiatry department.

“A previous shortage of psychiatrists resulted in significant cutbacks in our outpatient clinics,” said Dr. Ferri. “Dr. Okechukwu has now established a robust outpatient program with much-needed psychiatric follow-up appointments now being offered. He also works on the Acute Mental Health inpatient unit providing more help with day-to-day patient care and on-call availability.”

Dr. Ferri added that, with Dr. Okechukwu’s help, a rapid access clinic has been established to facilitate earlier psychiatric assessments through the hospital’s Emergency Department and in the community, and he is also helping out with the Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) team.

Born and raised in Nigeria, Dr. Okechukwu said his path to a career in medicine began with his parents who were primary school teachers. As the oldest in his family, he said it was his father’s wish that he become a doctor so he began a regimented course of study to achieve that goal – initially pursuing the specialty of obstetrics and gynaecology.

However, during his internship, Dr. Okechukwu lost his great uncle to suicide. Moved by the loss and the feeling that something should have been done to help him before he took his own life, Dr. Okechukwu felt a calling to the field of psychiatry with the hope that he could help others.

His training in psychiatry took place in Dublin, Ireland. A member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in the United Kingdom, Dr. Okechukwu worked as a consultant psychiatrist in Ireland for five years before friends in Canada enticed him to look at opportunities here. That led him to completion of his Fellowship in Psychiatry with Canada’s Royal College of Physicians in 2018.

After that, he said coming to Pembroke wasn't a difficult decision. "I don't like big cities – I got a taste of that working in Dublin and here I had to come to some of my exams in Toronto so I began looking for a place like this – a location that's not too far from Ottawa, where there are friends and an airport, but also a smaller community feel – a bit of both worlds," Dr. Okechukwu said.

The proximity of an international airport is important to him as his wife and children, three boys and a girl, are still living in Ireland while his wife, also a physician, is pursuing postgraduate training.

"I'm happy to be here. I see that I'm making a difference and people in the community, and my colleagues have been very supportive and have gone out of their way to welcome me so it has been easy to settle in," Dr. Okechukwu said.

What he likes most about psychiatry is that he can help to put a smile back on someone's face. "When you see people are struggling, it's about taking a holistic approach to their care. Sometimes they just want people to listen, they want to know that somebody is listening – and they open up and tell you personal things about their lives that they often don't even tell their family – all of that helps to see where they are coming from and it helps them in the process," he said.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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