

# Health Sciences North 2025 Annual Meeting

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Report from the Chief of Staff  
**Dr. Pankaj Bhatia**



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Annual Meeting – June 18, 2025**

Hello, Bonjour, Aanii.

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and share with you our journey through the 2024-2025 fiscal year. It is a pleasure and a privilege to report on the accomplishments we have collectively achieved, as well as the anticipated initiatives and challenges that will comprise the work we hope to realize as we move into the second half of the decade.

The completion of the fiscal year has seen HSN move into a new, forward-thinking, collaboratively-curated and ambitious strategic plan. This plan, Together for You 2030, will ground the organization in its goal of emerging as a leading academic health sciences institution. The work to develop this plan has been complex and exhaustive, but follows the fundamental tenets that enable HSN to be a true gem of Northern Ontario – excellent clinical care, patient-centred research, and high-quality teaching and mentorship of the next generation of health-care providers.

As I continuously cross between the clinical and administrative world, I am grateful of the fact that HSN has a culture that allows the recruitment and retention of amazing people who *care* – about the patients in the community, about their colleagues, about the region, and about our learners. The recognition that this organization, despite its complexity, must remain efficient and responsive to the needs of a large geographical region is in no small part due to the dedication of the people within all facets of the organization. This is not something that is always found in other health care organizations, and this attention to a culture of professionalism, self-sacrifice and collaboration has been built thanks to the people who have given their professional lives to HSN. We are truly lucky to have the people that we do.

The health-care sector is facing significant fiscal challenges. We, as an organization have had to make some difficult choices to respond to these pressures. What I believe we have accomplished better than most is to minimize, if not eliminate, the impact of this on the delivery of care to our patients. This ethos must continue, as it fundamentally allows the *people* within the organization to maintain their innovative spirit and will serve to attract the best minds of health care to bring their talents to our organization. Despite these challenges, we have seen several significant innovations and initiatives either begin or expand during the fiscal year, as I hope to highlight for you today.

Through the generosity of a donor within the community and the work of the HSN foundation, our organization has seen the establishment of a new electrophysiology lab

to help locally-treat patients with cardiac arrhythmias and conduction abnormalities. Under the leadership of Dr. Mohammed Shurrab, we have completed our first two sets of cases for patients that would have otherwise travelled to Toronto or beyond to receive the care they needed. This will continue to expand in the upcoming year. In addition, we have expanded the Cardiac Cath Lab hours and improved efficiency to allow a streamlined regional support program for our partner hospitals for patients presenting with myocardial infarctions. We are hoping to expand this to additional partners in the coming months.

HSN continues to offer life-saving therapies in neurovascular care, specifically endovascular therapy for thrombotic strokes. This has allowed the recruitment of specialized physicians to deliver this care, which can prevent patients from having *any* lasting deficits following a stroke. We have laid the groundwork to maximize this talent in a collaborative endeavour to establish a neurovascular centre of excellence which will see the expansion of the types of procedures we can offer locally, akin to only a few centres in Southern Ontario.

A fundamental cultural shift to prioritizing the education of the next generation of health care providers is occurring at HSN, which is driven by our valued collaborations with NOSM University, local nursing colleges and partner hospitals. This has coincided with the cultivation of an environment within HSN and HSNRI that both identifies and supports research projects designed to address the health care needs of the North. In addition to the significant work on updating our affiliation agreements with our partners, this aspect of our culture is no better exemplified by the HSN Simulation Lab and the Labelle Innovation and Learning Centre. Over the course of this fiscal year, the Lab has seen over 2500 learners participate in educational activities as members of both HSN, NOSM University and other partner organizations. This has amounted to over 15,000 learning hours from all participants. The demand on the physical space and expertise of the Lab continues to grow at an exponential rate, which will require ongoing support as we push the boundaries of high-fidelity simulation-based education and innovative research opportunities.

As the complexity of care increases, so to does HSN's need for specific areas of expertise, and a need to increase the overall physician workforce to adequately support the health care needs of our community and our region, further fulfilling HSN's mandate to deliver tertiary and quaternary level of care to Northern Ontario. To that end, we have been collectively successful in increasing the physician workforce at HSN by over 5%, with successful recruitment in high-risk disciplines such as plastic surgery, pediatrics, infectious diseases, critical care, and cardiology. A total of 32 new physicians were credentialed at HSN this past fiscal year. Each new year brings opportunities, through an assessment of our human resources plan, to focus enhanced recruitment strategies on disciplines that are collectively felt to provide exponential benefit to our patients, a challenge that we remain steadfast in achieving.

One June 4, 2024, HSN, along with 23 other hospitals within our region, made a fundamental shift in how we care for patients and engage in storage and sharing of information. The implementation of Meditech Expanse, our new regionally-governed, shared electronic medical record is commensurate with changes other regions have already implemented. As with any major system transformation, this has been met with challenges, but also the hope that once this system and its governance are optimized, the benefits to our organization and our patients will be significant and on par with our partner academic health sciences centres. It is important to recognize Mr. Steve Volpini, our Chief Information Officer, and Dr. Tyler Christie, our Chief Medical Information Officer, for their stalwart leadership and guidance through a somewhat unpredictable but improving change. Our leadership must continue to ensure that the system serves the needs of both our patients and our health care providers in a manner that is safe, efficient and exemplary. This will continue with rapid improvement events, a change management infrastructure that is provider-driven, and continuous support from our Informatics team at HSN.

As a result of many contributing factors, physician (and in general, health care provider) wellness is at the forefront of concern within the health care industry. Over the last 18 months, HSN and HSNRI have invested in improving staff and medical staff satisfaction through initiatives focused on wellness, engagement and recognition. At Health Sciences North, we are committed to creating and maintaining a collaborative, trusting, inclusive and sustainable work environment that supports the physical, psychological, social and community wellbeing of all members of Team HSN. This will enable every team member to thrive in the workplace while providing exceptional care, transformative teaching and impactful research. My thanks to Ms. Jessica Diplock, our Vice President of People and Culture, and Dr. Grace Ma, our Physician Wellness Officer for their leadership in that has allowed this culture of wellness to permeate every area within our organization.

I believe this summarizes, but is by no means summative of the work that this fiscal year has seen accomplished. This work would not be possible without the support from the team within the Medical Affairs office, and my fantastic colleagues within Senior Leadership. HSN should feel secured in knowing that a strong group of leaders are at the helm of the organization, whose strength fundamentally lie in the ability to *enable* the talent within the organization to do what they do best – take care of those in need. And we have the talent, be they nurses, physicians, physiotherapists, dieticians, attendants, security officials or anywhere in between, to continue to be a top academic health sciences centre in the country.

I would like to extend my thanks to the wonderful community and region we are blessed to reside in. Many members of our community, through their generous gifts of both their time and financial support, have allowed our organization to reach heights that would not be possible without their commitments. I am equally thankful for all of the philanthropic

work that our Foundation, lead by Mr. Anthony Keating, does to connect our community to our organization in so many meaningful ways.

It is with humility and appreciation that I offer my thanks to all of you for your time today. I remain invigorated by the possibilities that my new goals, which align with our strategic plan, will offer in the upcoming months, and feel well-equipped to navigate the inevitable challenges that arise within an ever-changing health care sector. I hope to take the many lessons I have learned this year in hand as I continue to be a person who will listen deeply to my people and strive to ensure their enduring success.

I am privileged to work at an amazing place that has been, and must continue to be, a hospital that provides outstanding and tireless care to the people of Northern Ontario. There is no other place I would rather be.

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