



Media Release

For Immediate Release

Transformational gift brings specialized eye care to Waterloo Region with launch of retinal surgery program at St. Mary's

Kitchener, ON | October 25, 2023 – St. Mary's General Hospital has launched a new retinal surgical program that will offer highly advanced vision services to Waterloo Region for the first time, thanks to a \$1.5 million transformational gift from The Savvas Chamberlain Family Foundation.

Bringing this highly specialized service to our community eliminates the need for patients to travel to London, Hamilton or Toronto when they experience a retinal or eye care emergency.

"As home to the Regional Eye Program, the absence of a retinal surgical program was a long-recognized gap in eye care in our community," says Dr. Chryssa McAlister, co-lead for St. Mary's Regional Eye Program. "Time is of the essence to mitigate potential vision loss in patients with retinal detachments and other urgent vision-threatening conditions. Having to refer patients out of town often meant delays in treatment and extra time spent travelling both for surgery and post-surgical care. Bringing retinal surgery to our community allows us to restore vision and prevent vision loss in patients with retinal diseases," she adds. "We are delighted to finally be able to offer this essential care close to home," says Dr. McAlister.

Funding has supported St. Mary's in hiring Dr. Carl Shen, an ophthalmologist and retinal surgical specialist, purchase specialized equipment and transform one of the hospital's existing operating rooms into an advance care suite.

The new program is projected to perform 100 cases in its first year and expand to more than 300 in its second year. The addition of the retinal surgical program and specialist team will provide opportunities to support a variety of complex cases onsite and support complementary care for local patients in-office.

"Given the distance to any of these centres in London, Hamilton or Toronto, a patient's access to timely care was unavailable in K-W," says Dr. Savvas Chamberlain, President and Director of The Savvas Chamberlain Family Foundation. "Our Foundation has worked closely with St. Mary's on this project for more than five years. This gift attempts to mitigate the issue of access by establishing a local retina program, ensuring immediate access to this specialized service is available in Waterloo Region."

Dr. Chamberlain was joined by his wife, Christine, and daughter, Maria Harper to celebrate the launch of the program through the newly named Savvas Chamberlain Eye Clinic at St. Mary's in honour of their generous support.

"Launching a new service as specialized as our retinal surgical program is transformative for patients who can now receive care locally instead of traveling to London, Hamilton or Toronto. Seed funding by our generous donors, and the collaborative work across our team, is how new programs like this come to be in our community," says Mark Fam, President, St. Mary's General Hospital. "The addition of this new service to the Regional Eye Program allows us to fulfil our commitment towards expanding equitable access to the highest-quality care, where and when our patients need it."

The program officially launched on September 25 when the team performed its first retinal surgery at St. Mary's.

"We are grateful to The Savvas Chamberlain Family Foundation for helping St. Mary's extend crucial eye care services across our community," says Susan Dusick, President and CEO of St. Mary's General Hospital Foundation. "Our community relies on St. Mary's to provide them with the best possible care when they need it. Donors like The Savvas Chamberlain Family Foundation help make sure St. Mary's staff have the tools and resources they need to do that."

- 30 -

More Information:

Dayna Giorgio
Manager, Communications
St. Mary's General Hospital
dgiorgio@smgh.ca | 519-895-6540

Alyssa Lai
Associate Director, Communications and Marketing
St. Mary's General Hospital Foundation
alai@supportstmarys.ca | 519-489-0751

Melissa Couto
Writer and Content Specialist
St. Mary's General Hospital Foundation
mcouto@supportstmarys.ca | 226-338-3763



Background

About St. Mary's General Hospital

Located in the heart of Kitchener, [St. Mary's General Hospital](#) is home to the Regional Cardiac Centre, Regional Chest Program and Regional Eye Program. As leaders in our field recognized globally for world-class, innovative healthcare, our vision of "Inspiring Excellence. Healthier Together" is not just about our approach to patient-centred care, it's also about our commitment to our staff.

For nearly a century, St. Mary's has provided compassionate care to our community serving over 1.4 residents locally and beyond each year. We are the second-largest acute care hospital in the St. Joseph's Health System with a team of over 2,000 staff, physicians and volunteers dedicated to ensuring patients receive the highest-quality care possible.

Learn more about [Our Mission, Values & History](#) and the [future of care at St. Mary's](#).

About St. Mary's General Hospital Foundation

[St. Mary's General Hospital Foundation](#) is a charitable organization dedicated solely to generating financial support for the life-saving care provided by St. Mary's General Hospital. Funds donated by the community through St. Mary's General Hospital Foundation go toward vital equipment, construction and resource requirements for St. Mary's General Hospital which are not covered by or exceed funding provided by the Ontario Ministry of Health.

[For more information, visit supportstmarys.ca](#)

About The Savvas Chamberlain Family Foundation

[The Savvas Chamberlain Family Foundation](#) was established in 2011 by Dr. Savvas Chamberlain and provides funding to a broad range of registered local, provincial and national charitable organizations annually on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of the Foundation.

Vision:

We believe that a civilized, gentle and caring society is beneficial to all the peoples of Canada. Further, we believe that provision of financial and other support of any magnitude and type to the underprivileged will also benefit all peoples and better our local and Canadian society.

Mission:

Through the provision of charitable support to the underprivileged, with help extended to the needy and the poor of our local and Canadian communities, and through the financial support for education, the arts, culture, music, health and welfare and the environment, we can fulfill our family vision.

[Learn more about The Savvas Chamberlain Family Foundation.](#)