By Cecelia McGuire

“Unpredictable” is the best way to describe working in AGH’s Emergency Department (ER), says Genevieve Browne, who has 11 years of ER experience. “Every shift is different. You never know what to expect. One day there might be a handful of patients with moderate clinic-type issues. Another day might bring serious trauma cases from motor vehicle accidents, or very sick patients with heart attacks or strokes.”

“It has something to do with the full moon,” quips Susan Abernethy, who has worked in AGH’s ER for 20 years. “Some days are quiet and other days are beyond chaotic.”

AGH’s Emergency Department is open around the clock seven days a week. Two nurses are on duty during the day and evening shifts while one nurse works overnight. A physician is available at all times. Patients range from infants to the elderly, and come from the Mississippi Mills area and surrounding communities, including west-end Ottawa.

A Day in the Life of an Emergency Department nurse at AGH

Both Browne and Abernethy say they thrive on the challenges of emergency nursing. “I enjoy the spontaneity,” says Abernethy. “We always triage, that is to ensure that the sickest patients get care first. Some patients don't understand that we don't work on a first come, first served basis, and with that comes the challenge of explaining how triage works.”

Browne points to the support and camaraderie of AGH staff. “We have a good partnership throughout the hospital,” she says. “If we have a surge of cases or a critical situation, we can get support from staff in other areas.”

Browne also enjoys the personal care she can give her patients. “In a large facility, the pace is very fast and high-pressured,” says Browne, who has worked at major hospitals in Eastern Ontario. “At AGH, we can look after the patient as a person and give them the attention and care they deserve.”

The AGH also has a great record for emergency response, says Abernethy. “We have everything we need at AGH to stabilize a patient. And in a critical situation, we can move a patient quickly to a tertiary-care hospital.” In fact, AGH’s ER ranked in the top 10 percent of 129 Ontario hospitals in a 2014 patient survey conducted by National Research Corporation Canada.

Browne sums up why she likes working in AGH’s ER. “The staff members are amazing. They’re dedicated, kind and hard-working. That makes coming to work a joy!”