

Need a Nurse Practitioner or Family Physician? Get Connected!

Record Number of Northerners Matched up by *Health Care Connect*

September 20, 2012 – For orphaned-patients looking for a primary care provider, Dr. Katherine Richardson advises leaving the search to the experts: Contact *Health Care Connect*.

“Every patient I have, with very few exceptions, has been referred by *Health Care Connect*,” Richardson said.

It’s provided an invaluable way for the new physician and her three colleagues at City of Lakes Family Health Team (FHT) in Lively to develop their practices. The four doctors, who have been practicing with the FHT for more than two years, are still adding patients to their roster with the goal of caring for about 1,200 each.

This tool, which can be accessed online or by phone, has already helped connect Northerners in record numbers to primary care providers. In the past three and a half years close to 26,000 people in the North East LHIN region have been referred to a family doctor or nurse practitioner through *Health Care Connect*.

“It’s been very helpful. I’ve really enjoyed working with the care connectors at the North East Community Care Access Centre,” Dr. Richardson said. “They ensure we have a variety of regular patients with a mix of complex and vulnerable ones.”

Once registered with *Health Care Connect*, Northerners then talk to a Care Connector, nurses employed by the North East Community Care Access Centre (NE CCAC), who work to refer them to a family health care provider as soon as one becomes available.

Patients are put into two main categories -- the complex-vulnerable and regular. Complex-vulnerable patients include children, pregnant women and those with complex and/or chronic medical conditions. Although priority is given to those in the first category, Care Connectors work with physicians to ensure that they have a balanced practice. Those who have registered but whose medical condition has changed are urged to update their status with *Health Care Connect*, as it might mean a shorter wait time.



The best way to find a primary health provider is by using Health Care Connect, say City of Lakes Family Health Team doctors Dr. Sarah Duncan (left), Dr. Liisa Levasseur and Dr. Katherine Richardson. Most of their patients at the Walden clinic have been referred to them by Health Care Connect.

The care connectors have also been able to help the new physicians at City of Lakes FHT work with patients in their areas of interest. Richardson enjoys helping pregnant women through labour and delivery, as well as patients with developmental disabilities, while some of her colleagues have a strong interest in geriatrics.

“*Health Care Connect* has also been able to ensure that we get the truly ‘orphaned patients’ as opposed to those who are shopping around,” Richardson added. “It is really important to us that we care for patients who have no one.”

Background

- The NE LHIN ranks in first place provincially, among the 14 LHINs, for the most patients registered and referred through *Health Care Connect* from October 2011 to March 2012. The region has also connected the highest number of vulnerable-complex patients.
- Altogether, more than 38,000 people in our region have registered with *Health Care Connect* to be linked with a family health care provider. The NE LHIN percentage of total registered referred to care has increased from 35 per cent two years ago to 57 per cent this past fiscal year (2011-2012). Of the patients referred, most were connected to a provider within four months.
- To register with the program, people can call 1-800-445-1822 (they’ll need a pen and paper and their OHIP card) or register online at www.ontario.ca/healthcareconnect.
- **Primary care options in Northeastern Ontario include:**
 - 538 family physicians
 - 27 Family Health Teams
 - 6 Community Health Centres
 - 6 Nurse Practitioner-Led Clinics
 - 1 Group Health Centre
 - 16 Nursing Stations
 - 3 Aboriginal Health Access CentresFor information on where to find these health care providers, call 1-866-330-6206 or visit www.ontario.ca/healthcareoptions.
- “Orphaned patients” is a term that refers to patients who have no primary care provider.

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