



February 10, 2014

Update to Lesser Slave Lake Health Advisory Council – Slave Lake Health Care

Every Albertan deserves access to quality, timely and responsive health care. That is true of people who live in the major urban centres, and it is true of those who live in smaller towns and communities across rural Alberta.

We would like to reassure the people of Slave Lake that we are committed to enhancing services in that community, not degrading or downsizing services.

Slave Lake is an important health care hub that serves not only the residents of Slave Lake, but Albertans from surrounding communities.

Let us highlight some of the things we have done, and are doing, in Slave Lake:

Obstetrics and Specialty Care:

Slave Lake is a Co-Hub for specialty care, including obstetrical care, in AHS' North Zone Area 6 (from McLennan, High Prairie, Slave Lake and across to Wabasca). "Co-Hub" refers to the Hub & Spoke model of specialist care delivery, where several rural communities work together to support the provision of specialty services in an Area to make the service sustainable in the long term for the specialist. High Prairie and Slave Lake are the 2 Co-Hubs in Area 6. At present two internists, a psychiatrist, an obstetrician and a pediatrician provide specialist support to Slave Lake.

In 2012, we successfully recruited a physician with obstetrics experience, enhancing our low-risk obstetrics program. The current low-risk obstetrics program has seen more babies delivered in Slave Lake since 2010. So far in 2013/2014, 42 babies have been born locally, compared with 31 the year before, and 24 the year before that.

We are actively recruiting for a new General Practitioner Anesthetist (GPA) as a top North Zone priority to support C-Section services in Slave Lake. In addition to our recruitment efforts, we have implemented an obstetrics education plan for our clinical nursing team and interested physicians.

Family Care Clinic (FCC) & Private Medical Clinic (Slave Lake's Family Clinic):

The Slave Lake FCC was the flagship for the province and has increased access and quality of care significantly.



Slave Lake residents have the best access to primary care in our North Zone – Same Day Access. We offer walk-in appointments at the FCC and have increased the hours of operation from eight hours to 12 hours a day, and from five days a week to seven days a week.

Since it opened in April 2012, there has been > 20% reduction in non-urgent patients using the Emergency Department as, between the FCC and the private clinic, patients are able to get the care they need in the community.

Slave Lake currently has 13 independent health professionals, including 6 physicians. Our 7 nurse practitioners (NPs) are well trained and experienced to manage the vast majority of cases that come to a family physician's office, while working closely with family medicine physicians as needed for more complex cases. Our NPs have completed either a master's or doctoral degree, and are licensed to make diagnoses, order and interpret tests, and prescribe drugs.

NPs are not physician substitutes; they are valued health team members who are licensed to conduct their own independent patient caseload/practice. Our Slave Lake NPs manage their patients as part of an inter-professional team with physicians, referring patients to other team members, including pharmacists, dietitians, social workers, and therapists as needed. Slave Lake has 7 NPs – the largest NP team in rural Alberta.

There is tremendous strength in the FCC's robust inter-professional team which, beyond our physicians and NPs, consists of two Licensed Practical Nurses, two Chronic Disease Management nurses, a Dietician, a Social Worker, a Pharmacist, two Physiotherapists, one Mental Health and Wellness Therapist, one Aboriginal Liaison and 11 Clerks.

These successes have not decreased our efforts to recruit at least two additional physicians for Slave Lake, plus a GP-Anesthesia to support C-Sections being done in Slave Lake as a top North Zone priority.

Seniors Health:

We added eight new Supportive Living spaces with 24/7 Health Care Aide supports. This increased access to 24 hour personal care services for our Home Care clients.

We are currently working with Points West Living to build a new Seniors Facility in Slave Lake, which will include 24 hour Supportive Living and Dementia services. The new facility will add 45 new spaces to the community. We hope the first sod will be turned in late spring.

Chronic Disease Services:



We have added three programs – Cardiac Health, Weight Wise, and Managing Emotional Eating – to the Better Choices Better Health program that runs in Slave Lake.

Addiction and Mental Health:

We have increased capacity to provide services for clients in crisis. Before 2011, services in this area were limited, however since the FCC opened, we have added two positions to our Mental Health team, as well as a Children’s Mental Health Therapist. A visiting psychiatrist also provides additional tele-psychiatry services.

The addition of Tobacco Free services, with a focus on children and youth, is already making an impact.

Public Health:

We have added Aboriginal Health Services, with an increased focus on Aboriginal health needs and services. In 2013, we added the Healthy Weights in Children and Youth Program, aimed at improving the health of local young people aged six to 18 years.

Acute Care:

With the support and help of Tri-Council, we have purchased new equipment, such as a glidescope (which supports physicians in providing advanced airway support in trauma and critically ill patients), a portable ultrasound, more bedside monitors, an obstetrical simulator (which assists in ongoing obstetrics training), and a retinal camera and tonometers (which enhance diabetic care).

We have enhanced our clinical education, advanced medication reconciliation (patient safety initiative improving the reporting of patients’ medications), and increased access to nursing education (fetal strip monitoring in obstetrics, pediatric IV insertion and cardiac monitoring).

Our enhanced Emergency Services orientation is currently assisting four of our acute care nurses.

We are proud to have had a pharmacy technologist join to our pharmacy services team.

Emergency Medical Services:

In July 2013, we introduced a Non-Ambulance Transport (NAT) service, which enables a dedicated EMS member to transport admitted, but stable and non-urgent patients via minivan to appointments in other communities. This quality initiative has further ensured Slave Lake’s timely access to EMS for truly emergent patients.



In September, AHS announced that all current medevac services and base locations will be retained while we develop a long-term plan that ensures high-quality, patient-focused medevac care for future generations. AHS has extended current contracts until March 31, 2014 while we work with those providers to secure new, three-year contracts. By extending current contracts and negotiating longer-term agreements, we can ensure patient care will not be interrupted while providing certainty for air ambulance providers. Over the next three years, AHS will continue to work, in consultation with communities and stakeholders, on a long-term air ambulance plan that will best meet the needs of patients and communities.

We will continue to invest in services locally, so that the majority of your health care needs are met locally. Timely access to quality and safe care is one of our core commitments.

We will continue to engage with you, listen to you, and answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Our staff and physicians will continue to work tirelessly to care for you and your loved ones. We are committed to providing the best health care we can to the people of Slave Lake, now, and in the future.

Regards,

Dr. Kevin Worry, Medical Director, AHS North Zone
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