

Media Release

Technology Helping to Improve Access to Care *North East LHIN Investing in Nurses and Telemedicine Technology*

July 23, 2012 More people living in the North East are benefiting from care closer to home following the North East LHIN's investment in 29 new telemedicine nurses.

For patients this means more care closer to home, less travel and an increase in the types of care available at more than 260 telemedicine sites across the North East LHIN. Use of this technology plays a critical role in the North East LHIN's plan to enhance access to primary care for Northerners across a region that is larger than Germany. "The North East LHIN is the highest user of telemedicine in the province," said Louise Paquette CEO, North East LHIN. "We've embraced this technology to help overcome challenges presented by our geography. These new nursing positions will enhance the system in place, helping more Northerners access care, closer to home."

Most of full-time equivalents of 14 Registered Nurses (RN) and 15 Registered Practical Nurses (RPNs) are now working in 14 Family Health Teams, three Community Health Centres, two community mental health providers, and 21 hospitals across the region.

At Sault Area Hospital, telemedicine coordinator Christine Dias, an RN, is helping patients meet with specialists in Toronto and Sudbury through two-way videoconferencing. The patients range from those needing bariatrics to pediatrics and from cardiology to oncology consultations. Christine is working to expand the hospital's use of telemedicine. Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN) has also helped manage the loss of one of two oncologists at the hospital. Patients can receive their follow up appointments in the Sault with specialists from the regional cancer program in Sudbury. "I really enjoy my job," Dias said. "I'm getting to know the patients and learn about new specialties. Most importantly, we're saving patients from having to drive 8 hours to Toronto or 4 hours to Sudbury ... If it means they don't have to travel just once, that's a good thing."

"The province has made unprecedented investments to improve and expand health care in Sault Ste. Marie and by hiring more nurses to help operate the local telemedicine programs we are able to increase the delivery of important front-line care to all residents," said David Oraziotti, MPP. "Our plan is to ensure everyone in the community has access to a primary health care provider and we have never been so close to achieving this goal as the province's investments in the local Family Health Teams, the Nurse Practitioner-led clinic and the Northern Ontario School of Medicine are delivering measurable improvements."

The telemedicine nurses like Dias use the latest technology for virtual patient consultations, assessments, training and knowledge exchanges through the OTN. With telemedicine, patients and health care practitioners are able to speak together and information, such as blood pressure, respiratory function and test results, transmitted instantaneously.

In Kirkland Lake, patient Rose-Lyne D'Aoust-Messier said the new telemedicine nurse at the Centre de santé communautaire du Témiskaming, as well as, some specialized equipment saved her months

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of waiting and travel, by coordinating her appointment with a family physician. After observing her skin infection through a special lens, her doctor then referred her to a dermatologist. “I’d much rather have a virtual video appointment than wait a long time for a face-to-face visit,” she said. “My nurse really made me comfortable and confident about the process.”

One of most memorable consultations for Janis Argent, an RPN, with the Temiskaming Community Health Centre, was with a patient who learned he had terminal cancer. “Now we’re helping him through his palliative stage, making him as comfortable as possible and helping with pain management so he can stay at home,” Argent said.

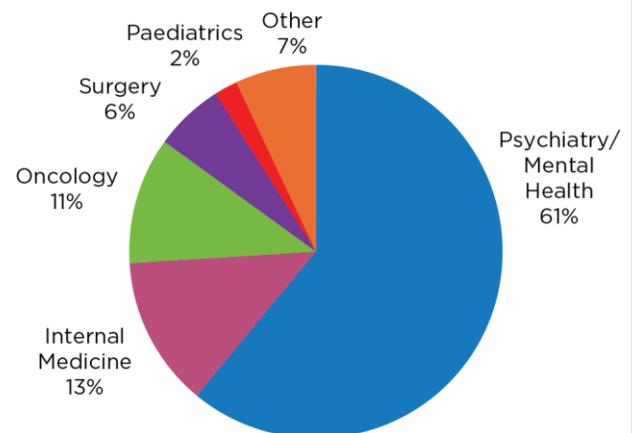
The telemedicine nurses at the community health centre are connecting clients to family physicians and other health professionals as far away as Windsor, using the technology to improve access to primary care.

“The new nurses allow for a continuous and quality accompaniment with clients who consult with various health care professionals such as a: family physician, specialist, dietician, physiotherapist and others,” said Jocelyne Maxwell, Ex, of Centre de santé communautaire du Témiskaming. “Additional nursing resources allows for good communication and continuity of services within the interdisciplinary team to ensure a better coordination of health care services with the francophone clientele.”

Here’s where the new nurses are working in the North East:

- **Algoma area:** Nine organizations have received **full or partial nursing positions** including Sault Area Hospital, Superior Family Health, Group Health Centre, White River Medical Clinic, Hornepayne Community Hospital, Blind River District Health Centre, Elliot Lake Family Health Team, and St. Joseph’s General Hospital (Elliot Lake), Baawaating Family Health Team.
- **James/Hudson Bay Coast:** Weeneebayko Area Health Authority.
- **Cochrane area:** Ten organizations have **received full or partial nursing positions** including Timmins and District Hospital, East End Family Health Team, Timmins Family Health Team, Centre Jubilee Centre, Smooth Rock Falls Hospital, MICs Group of Health Services (Anson General Hospital, Bingham Memorial Hospital and Lady Minto Hospital), Notre Dame Hospital, and Sensenbrenner Hospital.
- **Nipissing-Temiskaming area:** Eight organizations **have received full or partial nursing positions** including North Bay Regional Health Centre, Mattawa General Hospital, West Nipissing General Hospital, West Nipissing Community Health Centre, Kirkland District Family

Top Therapeutic Areas of Care: LHIN 13: 11/12



- Health Team, Kirkland and District Hospital, Englehart and District Hospital, and Centre de santé communautaire du Témiskaming.
- **Sudbury-Manitoulin- Parry Sound area: Eleven** organizations have received **full or partial nursing positions** including City of Lakes Family Health Team, Regional Cancer Program of Health Sciences North, Health Sciences North, Shkagamik Kwe Health Centre, Sudbury East Community Health Centre, Espanola Family Health Team, Manitoulin Central Family Health Team, Northeastern Manitoulin Family Health Team, Parry Sound Family Health Team, West Parry Sound Health Centre, and Burk's Falls Family Health Team.

Quick Facts:

- North East LHIN is investing \$2.1 million in new telemedicine nurses
- There are 261 OTN sites and 443 active systems in the North East Region.
- A total of 29 nurses have been hired across North East LHIN.
- In 2011/12, the use of telemedicine in Ontario has resulted in more than \$44 million in avoided travel costs.
- More than 3,000 health care professionals across more than 1,400 sites in Ontario use OTN to deliver care to their patients. This year, OTN will deliver more than 200,000 patient visits.
- At the first-ever Northern Telemedicine Forum held last year in Sault Ste. Marie, Ed Brown, head of the Ontario Telemedicine Network, said patients in the Northern Ontario in 2010/11 had avoided more than 61million kilometres of travel, along with Northern Health Travel costs of more than \$25million.

Background:

- Telemedicine services are made available through OTN (Ontario Telemedicine Network), a world leader in telemedicine. OTN facilitates the delivery of care for patients in hundreds of health care locations across the province, as well as distance education and meetings for health care professionals and patients. An independent, not-for-profit organization funded by the Government of Ontario, OTN is committed to improving access and quality of care.
- "Telemedicine tears down geographic barriers and increases access to much-needed health care services. For patients, it means greater peace of mind knowing that medical knowledge and expertise are easier to access with the help of this technology."
Dr. Ed Brown, CEO, Ontario Telemedicine Network
- For more information about OTN, please visit: www.otn.ca.

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