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NEWS RELEASE

Moms go virtual for healthy babies

For the first time in B.C., expectant mothers can participate in virtual visits with their maternity care provider directly from their local family doctor's office, thanks to new tele-maternity (video conferencing) technology developed as a part of a Shared Care/Kootenay Boundary Division of Family Practice pilot project. The project is funded in partnership by Doctors of BC and the Ministry of Health.

Women in rural areas have unique challenges to accessing care pre and post pregnancy. Geography, weather, and costs of travel can all create significant barriers to receiving timely maternity care.

These women can spend several hours travelling in order to access maternity care in the delivery centres of Trail and Nelson. This is especially challenging in the latter part of their pregnancy when visits need to be more frequent and weather makes it difficult to travel. The end result: women tend to see their maternity care provider later in pregnancy and less often.

As a solution to the problem, doctors from the Kootenay Boundary Division of Family Practice and maternity care providers have teamed up to offer tele-maternity through local doctors' offices in the region. Accessing the service is easy. Women wishing to use the service make their appointment with their regular family doctor and their maternity care provider at the same time. When the woman arrives at her local doctor's office, she has a physical exam with her family doctor and then meets virtually with her maternity care provider to discuss results and other care planning.

Jamie Colby, a young mom from Grand Forks, was able to use tele-maternity in December to connect with her midwife. Reflecting on her new option for maternity care, Colby said, "It was awesome. The visit was stress free, the connection was good and my doctor and midwife also seemed to really enjoy it."

"Innovative solutions, such as tele-maternity appointments ensure expectant mothers in the Kootenay Boundary region have timely access to high quality medical services that are tailored to their needs," says Minister of Health Terry Lake. "We have been using tele-health for some time now, to ensure greater accessibility to specialists for people throughout the province. Applying this virtual technology to maternity care helps decrease stress around traveling to appointments and strengthens the continuity of care for expectant mothers and their children."

Dr. Jeanette Boyd, physician lead for the project and maternity care provider based in Nelson, B.C. says "Women benefit greatly by being able to receive care within their own communities, while still fostering the important relationship with their birth doctor/midwife and gaining from their insight and expertise. In addition, the birth team has much to gain through this opportunity to build relationships and learn from each other."

“This is a new way of applying technology that has become familiar to anyone who chats online,” explains Mona Mattei, project manager for the tele-maternity pilot. “In the past patients and physicians would need to go to a high-tech video conferencing site at the hospital. This new tele-health service takes it to the next level. It’s easy to access and better for both patients and their physicians to ensure healthy babies.”

Mattei says they have tele-maternity sites at doctors’ offices ready to participate in Midway, Christina Lake, Grand Forks, New Denver and Salmo, and more locations are in the works.

If you are interested in using tele-maternity, contact your family doctor and ask them to join the service. Or contact, Mona Mattei, mmattei@divisionsbc.ca 250.443.1899 and pass on your doctor’s name for follow up.

BACKGROUND:

The tele-maternity pilot project was initiated by the *Kootenay Boundary Regional Perinatal Committee* comprised of specialists, family physicians, Interior Health staff and patients. The Committee prepared a strategic plan after completing patient journey mapping and consultation with regional stakeholders in late 2012.

Funding and support for the committee and this initiative is provided by [Shared Care Committee](#), a joint Doctors of BC/Ministry of Health partnership. The Committee’s support enables family and specialist physicians in the Kootenay Boundary region to work together and collaborate with Interior Health in their communities to improve patient care.

VIDEO

Watch this short video for an amusing account of a patient’s perspective of the project.

[Patient Perspective of Tele maternity](#)

Interview Subjects:

Dr. Jeanette Boyd, Nelson GP and birth doctor

Dr. Nathan Dalla Lana, Grand Forks family physician

Jamie Colby - patient

Tagline for attached photo: *Jaime Colby of Grand Forks and her newborn daughter Avery do a virtual check up with her midwife in Nelson. The tele-maternity program offers new mothers the option to meet through video conferencing with a maternity care provider in another community.*

Contact:

Paul Edney
Communications Manager
Kootenay Boundary Division of Family Practice
email: pedney@divisionsbc.ca
Cell: 250.551.1844

Mona Mattei
Shared Care Project Manager
Kootenay Boundary Division of Family Practice
email: mmattei@divisionsbc.ca
Cell: 250.443.1899

