



*Among the biggest success stories of the Cowichan Valley Division of Family Practice has been its ability to match new moms with doctors.*

## **GP for Me doctor program developed in Cowichan**

By Ashley Degraaf - Cowichan News Leader Pictorial

Published: March 01, 2013 12:00 PM

A Cowichan pilot program making big strides in attaching patients to family doctors was so successful it is being taken province-wide.

As part of the GP for Me program, a plan announced last week to meet the lofty goal of finding a family doctor for everyone in B.C. by 2015, the B.C. government revealed the Cowichan Valley Division of Family Practice as one of its three prototypes.

"We know that a strong primary care system built around continuous doctor-patient relationships can improve health outcomes for patients," said Health Minister Margaret MacDiarmid. "This new program will make it easier for physicians to provide high-quality care to their patients, and in many cases ease their workload so that they can accept more patients into their practices."

The Cowichan Valley Division of Family Practice exemplified exactly that.

"As a prototype community, we needed to do a bunch of the foundational work," CVDFP chair Tom Rimmer said.

According to the province, new primary care clinics were opened for patients, more doctors were recruited, and multi-disciplinary teams including nurse practitioners and mental health workers were developed in the pilot communities, which also included Prince George and White Rock/South Surrey.

Cowichan's made its mark by honing in on office staff efficiency at clinics, including new booking systems and going online with charting.

Many clinics, including Rimmer's Somenos Medical Clinic, have implemented an open access program where half a GP's day is formally booked ahead and the other half is left open for folks to call in the morning for last-minute check-ups, typically shorter appointments.

"It's nice for patients, especially if they've got a sick kid or a prescription to fill," said Rimmer.

They've also put their heads down on the issue of recruiting doctors, and are currently focusing on high-need areas including Lake Cowichan.

"We're trying to emphasize the point you need not only to recruit a doctor, but their family as well," Rimmer said.

And their biggest success included matching more than 250 moms and their babies with doctors from their care at CDH's maternity clinic.

GP For Me is supported by \$132.4 million in funding. A significant portion of this is from the existing physician master agreement negotiated by government and the BC Medical Association in 2012.

Among the features being implemented April 1 is funding to enable family physicians to consult with patients by telephone, incentives for physicians to add patients with complex conditions, such as cancer, onto their caseloads, and support for local physician groups to work collaboratively with health authorities to support better local access to primary care.

Studies performed two years ago revealed 4,000 Cowichanians were without a doc.