

Changing Healthcare

Match-making between retiring and new-to-practice doctors gives patients uninterrupted care

As part of the provincial A GP for Me initiative, local Divisions of Family Practice are working on a variety of strategies to prevent patients from losing access to primary care when a doctor retires.

Many young family doctors set out on their careers to get experience and eventually join a larger practice that integrates a multi-disciplinary approach to care.

By matching new-to-practice doctors with retiring GPs, and providing them with business coaching and supports to start and build a practice, the Vancouver Division of Family Practice is giving young doctors confidence to take over existing practices from retiring physicians.

"One of our newer to practice physicians had worked as a locum for a retiring GP on several occasions," recalls Rose Gidzinski, A GP for Me Project Implementation Manager for the Vancouver Division of Family Practice. "Like many physicians nearing retirement, he faced the prospect of closing the practice, leaving 1400+ patients without a family physician."

Through focus groups with both retiring and new-to-practice doctors, the Division identified that there was an excellent candidate to prototype their first match with taking over a retiring doctor's practice. A new to practice doctor who was already familiar with the retiring's practice and his patients had started to consider settling into a practice of her own.

"Initially, she was reluctant to take over a family practice clinic on her own. She wanted to work in a practice with other doctors. She had no experience running a business or managing employees. With a new baby on the way, she was concerned about work-life balance and her financial future," explains Ms. Gidzinski. "But with supports from the Division and the A GP For Me Initiative Attachment Team, she gained the confidence and supports needed to take on this practice." Together the two doctors worked with the Vancouver Division on key aspects of taking over a business; with discussions about hiring legal assistance for incorporation, obtaining a business license, negotiating a lease, various aspects surrounding staffing retention and human resources therein, financial modeling and budgeting as well as clinic optimization.

There were practical considerations too. A clinic facelift created a fresh, inviting environment, as well as make space for future examination rooms and physician associates.

"Young physicians aren't educated in how to start or run a viable business, yet expected to do so upon entering the workforce after training," says Ms. Gidzinski. "We are having these conversations now with dozens of young physicians whom we're assisting in trying to place and connect with other retiring doctors. Sometimes it is a straight take over, but in other scenarios it is about helping them build out their patient panel, open their own space or try various clinics to find the right fit."

"Providing young doctors with guidance about basic business principles, and working through the barriers of starting and running a successful practice and business seems to be working. This physician is continuing to be supported through the Division as she grows her business into a successful full service family practice to serve the citizens of Vancouver."

Today, the practice is thriving. The practice is taking on more patients and planning to grow with the addition of other doctors. "I'm even looking to add multidisciplinary care to my practice. Best of all, these patients still have a doctor, and I feel I am giving them good care," she says.



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