
Sunshine Coast Ramps up Recruitment Efforts to Address Family Doctor Shortage

Sunshine Coast Division of Family Practice Accelerates Recruitment for Family Doctors and Nurse Practitioners

Sechelt, September 9, 2024: With just over 6,000 patients on the Sunshine Coast's Health Connect Registry still waiting for a family doctor or nurse practitioner, the Sunshine Coast Division of Family Practice is accelerating its recruitment efforts.

In 2023, the Division joined forces with the Sechelt Hospital's Medical Staff Association to launch a Recruitment & Retention Committee. This committee, consisting of three family doctors, two part-time Recruitment Coordinators, and a recently added nurse practitioner, offers prospective doctors and nurse practitioners a comprehensive glimpse of life and work on the Coast by organizing community visits, wellness events and learning opportunities that strengthen the medical community.

The summer of 2024 was significant for recruitment, with five prospective family doctors visiting the community. These physicians toured clinics and the hospital, participated in outdoor recreational activities, and dined with local physicians to explore the possibility of practicing on the Coast. "Relocating to a new community is a major decision," noted Dr. Carmen Goojah, a palliative care physician and recruitment team member, "Moving countries or provinces is no small feat – prospective clinicians must make sure that the Sunshine Coast is the right fit for both them and their families. I'm optimistic that a collaborative medical and community recruitment effort will make moving to the Sunshine Coast an easy decision."

In the Fall of 2024, four new family doctors will join the Sunshine Coast community. Three of the doctors are fulfilling "Return of Service" (ROS) commitments, which means they are international medical graduates completing a two-year service contract in an underserved BC community. Statistically, retention rates for ROS physicians can range from 40-60% for them to stay in the community. Additionally, we are welcoming a full-time permanent family doctor to Arbutus Clinic in November. These providers will be instructed to utilize the Health Connect Registry or centralized patient waitlist to create their patient panels.

Recruitment remains a challenge, given the province-wide shortage of family physicians, with an estimated 20% of British Columbians without a doctor. "We are competing for a limited pool of

candidates,” noted Dr. Rob Lehman, Chair of the Sunshine Coast Division and Co-Convenor of the PCN Steering Committee. “This Fall, we plan to expand our recruitment efforts by partnering with local government and community organizations to offer more incentives and opportunities to attract prospective family doctors and nurse practitioners. Collaboration is essential in tackling this issue.”

The Sunshine Coast Primary Care Network (PCN), a partnership involving the Sunshine Coast Division, shishalh Nation, Pender Harbour Health Centre, and Vancouver Coastal Health, is also investing in recruitment through a new marketing campaign titled “Find Your Perfect Balance.” This campaign, created in collaboration with local agency Topshelf Creative, is designed to set the Sunshine Coast apart from other rural communities and attract primary care professionals seeking a balanced life and career. More details can be found at www.coastrecruitment.ca. The PCN has posted a marketing contract opportunity to help advance this campaign, now available on the Sunshine Coast Division website and social media platforms.

“We know solving this issue will take a collective effort,” said Dr. Lehman. “However, our community offers innovative leadership opportunities, and our collaborative spirit makes the Sunshine Coast an exciting place to work. We’re hopeful that our initiatives will yield positive results and enhance primary care on the Coast.”

If you’re on the Sunshine Coast and need a family doctor or nurse practitioner, register with the Health Connect Registry centralized patient waitlist at hcr.healthlinkbc.ca or call 8-1-1.

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