

Fraser Northwest physicians use collective power to improve care at residential facilities

NEW WESTMINSTER, B.C. – 3 August 2016 - For Al Vernon, knowing that wife Beth has 24-hour access to a doctor as a resident of Queen's Park Care Centre provides great peace of mind.

“It gives me such assurance,” says Mr Vernon. “I am absolutely happy with the care she receives. She has a doctor who visits regularly and he’s just wonderful.”



Dr. Petropolis (right) with patient Beth Vernon at Queen’s Park Care Centre.

That doctor is Dr Nick Petropolis, Physician Lead for the Fraser Northwest Division of Family Practice’s residential care program, started by the Division to improve patient care in residential facilities. The Fraser Northwest Division brings together family doctors from across New Westminister, Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam and Port Moody.

“As doctors, our goal is to always provide the best possible care for patients,” says Dr Petropolis. “Between busy practices and no coordinated system for seeing patients at residential care facilities during and after hours, it wasn’t always easy for facility

nurses to reach us when a patient needed to be seen, which could result in patients being sent to Emergency for things we could have treated them for at the facility; their home. We wanted to improve on that and thanks to funding from the GPSC (General Practice Services Committee), we have.”

Local doctors worked together to create a coordinated call system that lets staff from any of the region’s 15 residential care facilities reach a doctor, at any time, with a single call.

“Essentially, it’s 1-800-doctor. For the facilities, it’s the same number all the time. They don’t have to go down a list of names, calling until they reach someone or decide to transfer the patient to acute care if no one’s available,” says Dr Petropolis. “Now, calls go to an answering service which has our schedule and they reach out to the doctor on call. Typically, facilities are now hearing back from a doctor within 5 minutes of their call.”

Call scheduling takes place online, where doctors sign-up for slots that work best for them. There are two call groups, totalling approximately 20 doctors. In the event a doctor from one group can’t be reached, there is a built in backup where the answering service contacts the doctor from the other group to minimize patient waits.

“It’s working really well,” says Dr Petropolis. “Everyone in the groups has committed to taking on a certain number of shifts, so it’s a manageable time commitment that each doctor controls.

It's also led to our community of doctors developing closer relationships and we're there to help each other out. If I'm on call and want to take my child to swim lessons, I can phone the other doctor on call and ask them to cover me for that hour and vice versa."

Staff at residential care facilities has noticed the positive difference the new call system has made.

"We've been very impressed with how much easier it is to access a doctor after hours," says Margaret Ezzet, Director of Resident Services at Port Coquitlam's Hawthorne Seniors Care Community. "Our staff is so much more comfortable knowing that if a resident needs to be seen, they can reach a doctor right away."

Fraser Northwest's residential care program also includes regularly scheduled facility visits to provide patients with continuous, proactive care. Doctors in the program also collaborate on solving other challenges.

"By the nature of what we do, doctors usually spend a lot of time working alone. Through this initiative, we've realized we have a lot of the same challenges and collectively, we can address them," says Dr Petropolis. "For example, some doctors were having difficulty getting blood samples collected at facilities and we are collaborating with labs and facilities to fix that. We also connect on vacation coverage so our patients have continuity of care. With funding and collaboration, we've been able to make some real improvements we can all feel good about."

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