



The health needs are growing as our population expands in the communities served by the Sheep River Health Trust. The MD of Foothills reports that the population has increased on an annual basis of 5 – 7% over the past 20 years.

There are two age categories in the population that is experiencing a larger growth in our area. The health trust is monitoring the growth and providing support equipment and programs to meet the needs related to this growth.

Firstly, the infant population boom is above the average growth rate. The Public Health nurse reports 204 births in 2007 (January to June). For the same period in 2008, there were 363 births which is a 28.9% increase. The Sheep River Health Trust (SRHT) striving to meet the needs of this growth is in the process of funding equipment designed for infants. A Propaq Heart Monitor is being placed in both the Okotoks Health and Wellness Centre and the Oilfields General Hospital. These units will measure the baby's heart beat and are far more sensitive to a baby's heart rate than an adult monitor would be. In addition, SRHT is funding a colour-coded Pediatric Cart. The equipment will address pediatric emergency issues. Often seconds count and to have the supplies and instruments colour coded by age saves vital time. The cart will be placed in emergency facilities in the Okotoks Health and Wellness Centre and the Oilfields General Hospital in Black Diamond. With new parents facing the challenges of bringing up an infant, the Okotoks Health and Wellness Centre started the Toddler Learning Care Program (TLC) two years ago with 20 toddlers aged one – three years coming to the centre once per week. Within two years the program has grown to working with 58 toddlers and their parents. The growth has necessitated splitting the group and giving the toddlers attention every other week. This program supports young families that often do not have the support of grandparents and extended family in the community. New residents to the community can share together the information given by health professionals. The popularity of the program has caused it to “max out” according to Public Health Area Manager Anne MacKay. For school age children, SRHT through a sponsor provides the Breakfast Program in the schools within the communities. It has been proven that children who eat a hardy breakfast do better in school.

At the other end of the life cycle, the middle age (55 - 59 years) and senior (60 – 64 years) population is growing. In fact, residents of that age have increased 35.8% from 2003 to 2006, leading the population increase in our communities. With the SRHT's belief that responsible health care promotion includes encouraging personal responsibility for health, several programs have been implemented for this segment of the population in our communities, striving to emphasize a quality of life. The Adult Day Support Program cares for adults who need extra attention. The program provides learning or re-learning skills in a supportive, positive way to its clients. It allows participants to get out of the house and be among people under the supervision of professional health consultants. Often as important, it

provides respite for the care givers. The program currently has 20 clients in Black Diamond and 30 clients in Okotoks and is also “maxed out”.

An important medical service is Home Care provided to a number of our community residents. In an effort to allow adults to remain home, care givers will visit the homes as needed. Transportation is a huge issue for these clients. If the clients were told they had to come in to the hospital or centre for their treatment it is not likely they would get there. As well, if and when there is a need, members of the SRHT communities have Spiritual Care available to those who need to talk of their concerns.

SRHT continues to provide equipment and programs to meet the growing and changing needs of the communities it serves.