



Like so many services in our community, medical services are improving with the infusion of the latest electronic technology.

Perhaps the most notable service benefiting patients and facilitating acute and chronic health care in our communities is the collaborative project that has started in Black Diamond and is now spreading to Claresholm and Vulcan. Through this system health care providers can access medical records if permission is given by the physician. Lab tests, X-ray results, medications and specialists' reports can be made available. Security is extreme with security systems equalling or surpassing those used in banks. As part of the effort to provide care to those who cannot get to a doctor's office or clinic, home care nurses have teamed with a chronic disease management nurse, a pharmacist and a physician to provide care for patients in the seniors' lodge, using electronic technology to access medical information in the patients' file. This is a huge benefit to those in the lodge who find it difficult to get to the physician's office.

The Alberta government has initiated a new province-wide project called Alberta Net Care which includes medical records such as specialists' reports, laboratory results and medication lists. A health care professional now has records on a computer screen if allowed access. The care giver no longer has to wait days while the records are couriered or mailed to the caregiver. This new process saves time, money and often stress and pain for the client.

Another improvement to our community health care is found in the Oilfields General Hospital and Okotoks Health and Wellness Centre which both have Telehealth Systems. It is extremely useful in the event of many incidents. For example, if a rancher has fallen from a horse and has an unusually complex leg fracture, the doctor is able to X-ray the fracture and electronically transmit the image of the fracture to a physician's team at a hospital such as the Foothills Hospital in Calgary. The surgeon's team will review the X-ray and communicate with the Oilfields doctor on how to set the fracture. The patient does not have to travel to Calgary.

A final example of electronics at work in our community is illustrated in the alacrity of patient care in an emergency situation where an ambulance with FREMS responds to a call. As the patient is being transported to a selected medical centre, the FREMS representatives can call ahead and give the name of the patient and the symptoms. The medical team look up the records of the incoming patient, prepares the treatment room and is ready when the ambulance and patient arrive.

Electronic medical services is a strong component of our community.

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 Propak Heart Monitor is being placed in both the Okotoks Health and Wellness Centre and the Black Diamond 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 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 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 nurse 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 hard breakfast do better in school.

At the other end of the life cycle, the later 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 client spaces 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. Finally, 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.