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New physician arrives as longtime local doctor retires

SLAVE LAKE — The recruitment of a new family doctor will ensure access to primary care will not be affected by the retirement of a longtime local physician.

Dr. Geoffrey Bourke began practising in Slave Lake last week, following the retirement of Dr. Paul Caffaro the week before.

Dr. Bourke is a general practitioner with additional post-graduate diplomas in diabetes, child health, dermatology and antenatal care. He was recruited from Ireland to work in Slave Lake this past April and has since completed his work permit and immigration process.

“We’re pleased with the arrival of Dr. Bourke and wish Dr. Caffaro nothing but the best as he begins his retirement,” says Town of Slave Lake Mayor Tyler Warman. “The amount of time and commitment Dr. Caffaro has dedicated to Slave Lake speaks not only to the dedication he has for his practice and his patients, but also to everything Slave Lake has to offer as a great place to live.”

Dr. Bourke is one of five new physicians recruited by AHS to Slave Lake since last winter. Two are now practising; three others are in the middle of their work permit and immigration processes. Two of the newly recruited physicians bring specialties needed to expand obstetrical services at the Slave Lake Healthcare Centre.

The current physician team in Slave Lake has also been expanded with locum (visiting) physicians and five full-time-equivalent nurse practitioners at the Family Care Clinic (FCC), which offers primary care services.

“The Family Care Clinic in Slave Lake offers an inter-professional healthcare team involving physicians providing a broad range of services across extended hours in one location,” says Dr. Kevin Worry, North Zone Medical Director with AHS.

“This approach increases access to primary care services, offers patients and their families comprehensive care close to their home, and is integrated with other health services and community supports and programs. Physicians have indicated to us that they like this service delivery because of the team support and business model.”

Dr. Caffaro agrees, saying the opening of a local FCC was a “significant and positive change” for delivering health care in Slave Lake.

“This form of health care delivery will allow for better coverage in northern rural communities, which are wonderful places to work in my experience,” says Dr. Caffaro.

Dr. Caffaro has been practicing in Slave Lake since 1975.

“I chose to move to Slave Lake because I wanted to experience rural general practice. During my time here, I have enjoyed all aspects of rural medicine, including general surgery, emergency work, and flying to remote First Nation communities for clinic. I especially enjoyed First Nation communities for their kindness and acceptance of my services.”

“I hope the new physicians coming to Slave Lake will enjoy the diversity of rural practice, their new friends, and everything this wonderful community has to offer.”

As part of an overall physician recruitment strategy, AHS has three North Zone physician resource planners who identify and pursue physician recruitment opportunities. They work closely with various community partners and organizations in northern Alberta, such as the Rural Physician Action Plan, Health Advisory Councils, and independent community physician recruitment and retention committees.

Slave Lake residents are encouraged to visit <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/9684.asp> for updates health care in their community. The public is also welcome to provide feedback and ask questions about local health care delivery through the Lesser Slave Lake Health Advisory Council; its next meeting is Sept. 8 from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. in High Prairie. For more information, please visit <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/hac.asp>.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than four million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

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