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New High Level services bringing care close to home

Echocardiogram and colposcopy clinics reducing need for patients to travel

HIGH LEVEL – Local residents who need echocardiograms and colposcopies can now get these specialty services at the Northwest Health Centre.

Echocardiograms will be offered one day a month at the facility, and colposcopies two days a month from February to June and September to November. These new local services are available through a partnership involving Alberta Health Services (AHS), the Northwest Health Foundation and Northwest Primary Care Network.

“These two new clinics will help local physicians diagnose and treat our patients without having to refer them to a larger centre, reducing travel for patients,” says Dr. Heinrich Brussow, Community Medical Director and Associate Zone Medical Director.

Echocardiograms are ultrasounds of the heart that help physicians assess a patient and diagnose heart conditions. Sonographer Dianna McNeally will travel to High Level with visiting physician Dr. Ben Tyrell. They will see about five patients a month.

Colposcopies are done to prevent cervical cancer by detecting and treating precancerous lesions early. Dr. Brian Muir will travel from Grande Prairie to perform the procedures using new equipment purchased with funds from the Northwest Health Foundation. Dr. Muir will also be available for obstetrical gynecological referrals and other services as needed.

Area resident Margareta Bueckert, 62, says she no longer needs to make a five-hour trip to Grande Prairie or a nine-hour trip to Edmonton to access colposcopy services.

“Going to the city and getting around there isn’t something I’m used to, since I’ve lived in the country all my life,” says Bueckert, who lives on a farm near High Level.

“I don’t even go to town every week. So I am really thankful I am able to stay close to home.”

The Northwest Health Foundation contributed \$30,000 to help purchase the colposcope equipment. The money was raised through the Mackenzie County Regional Charity Golf Tournament, various casinos, and other fundraising activities.

“High Level is so far away from Grande Prairie,” says foundation chair Sandy Mann.

“For patients needing these services, it’s a five-hour drive there, often an overnight stay, and all the expense associated with that, plus the long drive back – for an appointment that might take 15 minutes. AHS and Dr. Muir have been such a big help to us up here.”

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AHS continues to work with the foundation to bring new equipment and improved health care access to the High Level area.

The Northwest Primary Care Network is supporting the two new services by paying travel costs for the specialists.

“Our patients are going to benefit greatly thanks to the primary care network and the Northwest Health Foundation, who enabled us to add these two new services to our region,” says Steve Rideout, Seniors and Medical Clinic Manager – High Level, Rainbow Lake & Paddle Prairie.

“We are constantly looking for new ways to deliver quality care closer to where our patients live. Whenever we can ensure quality services locally, it delivers a huge benefit to our patients.”

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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