

***Why is there less access to “walk-in” appointments at the FCC right now?***

We understand community frustration related to the “walk-in” service at the FCC, and we acknowledge that the situation over the holidays was less than ideal.

The holiday period, from late December through early January, is particularly challenging when it comes to ensuring we have enough staff at the FCC.

This is not unique to Slave Lake, but a challenge we face across the province as we try to balance keeping as much service as possible open while giving our staff well deserved time off over the holidays. This can be compounded when we have staff vacancies or leaves for any reason.

When the FCC is fully-staffed, there is more than adequate support for our residents in Slave Lake.

While each of our physicians/nurse practitioners takes “fit ins” or “same day appointments” in addition to their booked appointments, and the Emergency Department is staffed 24/7 with an ED physician and nurses, we are currently managing with less than optimal FCC staffing numbers (maternity leaves, personal health issues, and a couple of vacancies that we are working hard to fill).

It is important to point out that in most other Alberta communities, clinics (both private and public) were operating on reduced hours or even closed over this time. This was certainly the case with many physician offices.

This is not intended as an excuse, but as an explanation – we should have done a better job managing the staff shortage over the holiday period, and we are committed to doing better going forward.

However, we have taken steps to improve access to the FCC, particularly for “walk in” patients, and have already seen results. This past weekend, wait-times at the FCC averaged between one and two hours, which is a marked improvement.

***Can I get healthcare in Slave Lake when I need it?***

Yes.

Our Emergency Department is open and staffed by an experienced team of physicians and nurses providing timely access to urgent & emergent healthcare issues 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This did not change over the holidays.

Our FCC is open and staffed by an experienced team of physicians and nurses providing timely access to primary care, public health, chronic disease management, addiction/mental health, social work, allied health, and many other health issues 7 days a week across extended hours (beyond a typical clinic’s hours of 9-5 weekdays). The “walk-in” service of the FCC returned to its normal hours on Saturday, January 7th.

These extended hours of service were not available every day over the holidays, and some “walk-in” patients waited longer than usual, due to staffing shortages. Since then, wait-times have come down significantly at both the FCC and the Emergency Department.

***Is this a failure of the FCC? Does this prove the model is not working?***

No, the FCC is a success, and has significantly improved healthcare delivery in Slave Lake and surrounding areas. The current situation is a staffing challenge, not an issue with the FCC model.

Slave Lake's FCC is based on solid principles used in high performing health systems internationally including:

- Improving patient access by providing extended hours during the week and on week-ends. Fifteen percent of all clients coming to the FCC choose to come during the extended hours (after 4 p.m. on week days, and/or during weekends) – this service was not previously available in Slave Lake.
- Providing patient focused care to enhance patient satisfaction (80 per cent approval).
- Ensuring team-based health care which, according to the medical literature, provides patients with better health outcomes. Slave Lake's FCC has a sizeable health care team of 22 professionals including physicians.
- When appropriate, facilitating Slave Lake residents seeing the right healthcare team member (collaborative care) directly for their health condition without having to wait for a referral.

We know collaborative care works. The introduction of a collaborative care model has enabled individuals and families to access comprehensive care that's integrated with other health services and community supports and programs.

Residents aren't required to see a physician to access services, such as chronic disease management or addictions and mental health counselling.

In Slave Lake, local and area residents are getting more effective and timely health care than they were before the collaborative care model was introduced in April 2012.

Since then, the number of visits to the local emergency department has dropped significantly, meaning that more people are getting the comprehensive care they need at the FCC, decreasing demand on the ED.

In the first year after the FCC opened, ED visits fell by more than 14 per cent, and after two years ED visits had fallen by more than 18 per cent.

Through the FCC model of care, we have seen improvements in clinical outcomes as demonstrated in reductions in individuals living with diabetes.

The model of care supports all healthcare providers to work to their full scope of practice – several of our staff members and physicians have specifically moved to Slave Lake due to this model.

The FCC works. We just have to continue to ensure the resources are in place for that to continue.

***What are you doing about the current situation at the FCC?***

We are pleased to announce that we have recruited a Nurse Practitioner, who began work at the FCC today (January 9, 2017), specifically providing care to walk-in patients.

This is particularly good news, in that our new NP was working as a student in Slave Lake, and was so impressed with the community and the model of healthcare provided here, that she decided to stay upon her graduation.

We are also working hard to recruit a second additional Nurse Practitioner.

Beyond this, we have recently secured two additional long term physician locums to work over the next several months (one long term physician locum was already in place).

This, in turn, will reduce wait-times for patients wanting to see their regular healthcare provider, as those physicians are currently sometimes tied up seeing walk in patients.

While healthcare providers, like everyone else, take maternity leaves when building a family, or experience personal health issues that need to be addressed, we are committed to ensuring that high quality and safe patient care continues to be available in Slave Lake.

With multiple steps being taken, we anticipate that we will further reduce the wait times for some of our “walk-in” patients.

***Why doesn't AHS set up private clinics in Slave Lake?***

AHS would happily support any physician who wishes to set up a private clinic in Slave Lake. This has always been the case, and will continue to be the case.

However, it is important to note that private physician clinics are not the purview of Alberta Health Services – such clinics are typically created and operated by physicians functioning as independent contractors running private for-profit businesses.

***What is AHS doing to support healthcare services in Slave Lake?***

In addition to the FCC – which provides extended hours, same day access, better outcomes, access to more chronic disease resources, and has resulted in decreased demand on our ED – we have put significant efforts into recruitment in Slave Lake.

Since early 2014, AHS has successfully recruited five new physicians to the community. Slave Lake currently has six fulltime physicians practicing in the community, with one physician on maternity leave.

We are actively and aggressively recruiting for another family physician with interests in obstetrics, to fill the vacancy created by Dr. Immelman's retirement. We're happy to share that we will be interviewing an interested applicant (a University of Alberta graduate currently living in BC) for this position this week.

As previously announced, AHS has also recently recruited a seventh physician for Slave Lake – Dr. Frank Akwa is a Family Medicine physician with Enhanced Surgical Skills (supporting local C-sections) and obstetrical experience. Dr. Akwa is currently undergoing his College of Physicians & Surgeons’ mandatory assessment (he’s joining us from overseas). We expect him to start his practice in Slave Lake this May.

The significant recruitment efforts has, in turn, resulted in the return of full obstetric services – including Caesarean sections, epidurals and inductions - at Slave Lake Healthcare Centre last year, meaning expectant moms can now have their babies in their own community rather than having to travel out-of-town.

As mentioned, we have just successfully recruited a Nurse Practitioner, and are recruiting a further NP.

It is important to note that the FCC model assists with recruitment to Slave Lake.

***Why does AHS not listen to us, and address our concerns?***

We are committed to providing the community with information, and to answering any questions and concerns you may have.

We acknowledge that we can always do a better job of engaging with the residents of the community, and we hope that this latest effort helps to satisfy some of your concerns, or at least provide some context to local healthcare concerns.

Much of this debate is taking place on a closed social media site, which does make it difficult for us to hear your concerns and respond. We appreciate the Mayor and MLA reaching out to us to ensure we were hearing and acting on your concerns.

Our goal is to always be open and transparent with Albertans regarding our healthcare system.

Please contact Patient Relations (Toll-free 1-855-550-2555), your local AHS leaders Cindy Harmata, at [Cindy.Harmata@ahs.ca](mailto:Cindy.Harmata@ahs.ca); or Dr. Keith Martin, at [Keith.Martin2@ahs.ca](mailto:Keith.Martin2@ahs.ca) with any additional questions or concerns.

Further questions or concerns can also be directed to AHS’ North Zone Medical Director, Dr. Kevin Worry at [Kevin.Worry@ahs.ca](mailto:Kevin.Worry@ahs.ca).

We will do our best to answer further submitted questions on this site, at a later date.