

NEWS RELEASE
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A GP for Me a success in Cowichan; new referral line introduced for patients

Cowichan GP Referral Line 1-866-460-3649

Duncan, BC — Any Cowichan area resident who is looking for a family doctor can now be matched with one as a result of the successful implementation of the A GP for Me initiative. Since 2011, over four thousand patients in the Cowichan area have found a doctor, and going forward, any resident can call the GP Referral Line at **1-866-460-3649** to be connected to a doctor accepting patients.

The Cowichan Division of Family Practice, made up of 102 local family physicians, has worked with community partners to implement a number of initiatives through A GP for Me since the prototype began in 2011. A GP for Me is a province-wide initiative supported by the Government of BC and Doctors of BC. Its aim is to improve access to primary care and help more British Columbians who want a family doctor to find one. Other prototypes were located in Prince George and Surrey-White Rock, which also now have no waits for patients wanting a family doctor.

“The Cowichan Division has worked hard to connect residents who need a primary care provider with a physician. As well, their recruitment efforts, the creation of the maternity clinic and their work to strengthen practice efficiencies have supported increasing primary care capacity in this region,” said Health Minister Terry Lake. “These efforts solidify the overall health of the community, as well as contribute to the work we are doing at a provincial level to build up primary and community care supports for all British Columbians.”

Starting in 2011, the Cowichan Division collaborated with Island Health, community organizations, health care providers and local residents to determine the primary care needs of communities in the region. As a result, they discovered that approximately 3600 people did not have a family doctor and couldn't find one. By March 2015, the division had exceeded their original goal and had found primary health care providers for over 4200 people.

“Collaboration has been the key to our success,” says Dr. Trudy Woudstra, Cowichan Division board member and co-chair. “We have also built great relationships with our community partners and the local health authority that have allowed us to not only address current issues, but to consider the bigger picture and how we can impact population health.”

In addition to the GP Referral Line, the division has taken on several other projects to meet the needs of patients in the Cowichan area. One of the first projects was the creation of the Cowichan Maternity Clinic. Located in the hospital, the clinic provides care to mothers and their babies - before and after delivery. There is a full-time nurse on site and a flexible schedule that makes it easy for mothers to drop in, even without an appointment. Counselling support is offered to high



risk mothers, and any mother without a doctor is connected to a family physician, along with her family members.

“When I found out I was pregnant, I was really scared,” says Stephanie Sine, a Cowichan Maternity Clinic patient. “I had recently moved to the area. I didn’t have a doctor and I didn’t know where to turn. When I called the Maternity Clinic, I nearly started crying. The receptionist was so kind and helpful and the doctors and nurses there ended up taking such good care of me and my baby.”

The division is also actively involved in attracting new doctors to the Cowichan area and supporting current doctors, so they will stay in the community. Three new family physicians have moved into the division, including two GPs in Lake Cowichan who replaced doctors who had left. Doctors already in practice are being offered assistance to help them run their offices as efficiently as possible, giving them more time to see patients. Another division project ensures that all hospital patients at Cowichan District Hospital have a family doctor - during and after their stay.

While anyone who currently does not have a doctor can find one, the division is focused on continuing to provide the best primary care possible, including strengthening relationships between patients and doctors.

“We’ve made a lot of progress, but we can’t stop here. We have to keep looking ahead because things change quickly if a doctor decides to retire or leave the community,” says Dr Jim Broere, Cowichan Division board member and co-chair. “Overall, we feel more confident now that we have built a strong foundation for the future of health care in Cowichan.”

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About the Cowichan Valley Division of Family Practice

The Cowichan Valley Division of Family Practice is part of the Divisions of Family Practice initiative, funded by a joint committee of the BC Ministry of Health and Doctors of BC. There are 34 Divisions of Family Practice in B.C. in more than 220 communities.

The Cowichan Valley Division of Family Practice is not-for-profit group of physicians from the communities of Mill Bay, Shawnigan Lake, Cobble Hill, Duncan, Lake Cowichan, Chemainus, Penelakut Island, and Ladysmith. CVDFP has been formed to support the people and family physicians of the Cowichan Valley; to identify gaps in patient care; and to develop solutions to meet the community’s needs.

About A GP for Me

A GP for Me is a joint initiative of the Government of BC and Doctors of BC aimed at strengthening the health care system by supporting the relationship between patients and family doctors. Research shows continuous doctor-patient relationships lead to the best health outcomes for patients. www.AGPforMe.ca

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A GPSC initiative

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