

North West LHIN – May 11, 2011

Improving Access to Care Through Technology

Patient care through technology and telecommunication – known as telemedicine – is an essential service for the people of Northwestern Ontario, which is why the North West LHIN just recently invested \$353,971 in telemedicine expansions and upgrades across the region.

This technology improves access to care for Northern Ontarians by ensuring that residents can receive care quickly, efficiently and as close to home as possible.

The North West LHIN is the largest LHIN (more than 458,000 sq. km) with the lowest population (235,000 people). This represents over 47% of the province's land area and 2% of the population. Without telemedicine, people would have to travel great distances for medical care.

Telemedicine is used heavily in the North West LHIN. For example, based on statistics from the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN):

- Last year, the use of telemedicine in the North West LHIN resulted in more than \$9 million in avoided travel costs, and more than 23 million kilometres in avoided patient travel.
- There are 121 active OTN sites and 187 active systems in the Northwest, representing 12 percent and 9 percent respectively of the entire Network.
- Last year, Northwestern Ontario hosted 22,075 clinical events on the Ontario Telemedicine Network, including:
 - Tele-ophthalmology
 - Angioplasty consults
 - Access to specialists and specialized services such as stroke care, diabetes, chronic care, and wound care
 - Pre-surgical check-ups
 - Oncology treatment consultation
 - Mental health assessments, treatment and counseling
 - Access to psychiatric and specialized consultation (eg. Addiction services, eating disorders)
 - Geriatric assessments
 - Outreach support to remote northern communities

A first-ever Northern Telemedicine conference was presented on May 6th by the OTN in partnership with the North West and North East LHINs. Approximately 100 Telemedicine Coordinators (clinical and non-clinical), administrative staff and managers working in the field of telemedicine attended the forum in Thunder Bay and Sault Ste. Marie, through videolink to both sites. Presenters shared telemedicine experiences, best practices, and new programs and technologies.

A Telemedicine Story

Thanks to the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN) and the North West Community Care Access Centre (CCAC), regional volunteers with Hospice Northwest are able to receive comprehensive training on palliative care.

Training they wouldn't otherwise get, says Joan Williams, Executive Director of the non-profit charity that provides compassionate support to individuals and their caregivers as they face the challenges of living with a life-limiting illness.

"If we didn't have access to the videoconferencing equipment, it would be extremely difficult for us to connect with everyone, given our geography and weather conditions much of the year," Williams says.

LHINs are the only organizations in Ontario that bring together health care partners from the following sectors – hospitals, community care, community support services, community mental health and addictions, community health centres and long-term care – to develop innovative, collaborative solutions leading to more timely access to high quality services for the residents of Northwestern Ontario and the province. By supporting these important partnerships, LHINs are ensuring that Ontarians have access to an effective and efficient health care system that delivers improved health care results and a better patient experience.