

Complex System | Clearly Defined



Articles that explore health care issues in our LHIN

Primary Health Care in Erie St. Clair LHIN

Health care is no stranger to jargon, acronyms or complicated phrases that can be disorienting, even for insiders. One such term that will be familiar to many, but not well understood, is 'Primary Care'.

Primary Care is most commonly referenced as the type of health care received from your family doctor. It is, or should be, the first point of contact between a patient and the health care system when illness becomes apparent. The definition also implies continuity in care, that is the ongoing management of conditions that a doctor or team of professionals can provide. Having access to Primary Care is about working with your provider to maintain or improve your health and wellness.



For consumers, Primary Care is about being able to book an appointment or walk into their health care providers office; receive care that is consistent and in keeping with their medical history; renew a prescription; get a specialist referral; and, come back for follow-up care to ensure their health is on the right track.

Primary Care Models

Shortages of doctors and nurses along with a need to realign health care to better meet the ongoing care needs of Ontarians, is driving a shift in the models used to deliver Primary Care.

Primary Care has evolved and expanded in Ontario to include several new care models, such as Family Health Teams, Community Health Centres and the most recent Nurse Practitioner Clinic. Again, the names may be familiar, but the

substance of what they are is not.

Primary Care is the first point of contact between a patient and the health care system.

To support this transition in health care, consumers need to feel confident that these new models will give them better choices for Primary Care. The following are explanations of the new

choices available to people living in the communities of Erie St. Clair.

Family Health Teams

Doctors in Ontario have been doing a great job for their patients over the years in all of the areas of Primary Care. Now, Family Health Teams will build on this foundation by bringing professionals together to organize care in new ways and to complement each others skills.

Family Health Teams are groups of health care professionals, such as physicians, Nurse Practitioners, nurses, social workers and dieticians who coordinate the best possible Primary

Care for their patients. Enhanced services include health promotion, treatment services, chronic disease management and prevention, rehabilitation and palliative care.

Family Health Teams also provide extended office hours (check with your local FHT for details) to provide health advice and care so their patients do not have to go to busy hospital Emergency Departments for non-emergency care. Simply put, Family Health Teams are focused on the patient, both in proactively ensuring the health of the patient (not just treatment when they are sick), and creating a better consumer experience by improving access.

Within the Erie St. Clair LHIN there are seven Family Health Teams – Amherstburg, Chatham-Kent, Harrow, Leamington, Rapids (Point Edward), Tilbury and Windsor with affiliated offices in smaller communities. Your family physician may be a member of a Family Health Team.

Health care professionals working within a Family Health Team are able to make the best use of their skills in being part of an inter-professional team. In this health care team, members can share their knowledge and learn from one another as well as look at the patients needs across their disciplines providing enhanced care. They are also able to share on-call responsibilities, knowing that their patients will be well cared for when they are not available. A Family Health Team may also include grouped or networked practices.

Educating their patients in healthy choices and prevention of illness is a key component of the Family Health

Family Health Teams are able to focus more on helping people stay healthy and prevent illness, instead of simply reacting and treating illnesses.

Team model. Teams are able to focus more on helping people stay healthy and prevent illness, instead of simply

In Windsor, the Family Health Team is affiliated with Windsor Regional Hospital in creating high quality primary health care for the 15,000 patients expected to roster there when fully operational. The average age of admission at Windsor Regional is 66 years and with baby boomers now in their early 60s, the demand of this generation on health care services is here. Keeping baby boomers healthy by linking them with Primary Care models such as the Family Health Team

Get Connected

Web Sites for Community Health Centers

Sarnia-Lambton

- Grand Bend Area CHC: www.gbchc.ca/
- North Lambton CHC: <http://www.nlchc.com/>

Windsor/Essex

- Sandwich CHC: www.sandwichchc.org
- Teen Health Centre: <http://www.nlchc.com/>

reacting and treating illnesses. Patients become an important partner in their own health care and are given the self-help tools to improve their health.

This comprehensive Primary Care model has also expanded access through the Telephone Health Advisory Service. This provides extended hours and after hours access to a Registered Nurse where patients can speak to a Registered Nurse with access to patient information. If necessary, a member of the Family Health Team will call the patient back.

is one strategy in relieving the volume of Emergency Department visits.

The Leamington Family Health Team currently has 12,000 rostered patients, providing primary health care to thousands who previously had no family physician. As part of their model, physicians recruited to the Family Health Team also commit to working shifts at the local Emergency Department, filling a void in shift coverage that had been problematic in the past.

Community Health Centres

Where Family Health Teams operate like an enhanced family doctors office, Community Health Centres (CHCs) have a specialized mandate to provide Primary Care to specific populations while providing outreach into the community.

CHCs are non-profit organizations that provide Primary Care and health promotion programs and services through teams of health care professionals. They have client rosters just like family doctors or Family Health Teams and provide care in teams that often include physicians, Nurse Practitioners, dietitians, health promoters, and counselors.

a family doctor, CHCs target populations with special needs, such as the low income families, new immigrants, Aboriginal peoples, and seniors. The programming offered by CHCs is geared to the population's needs, which are typically more demanding than the general population.

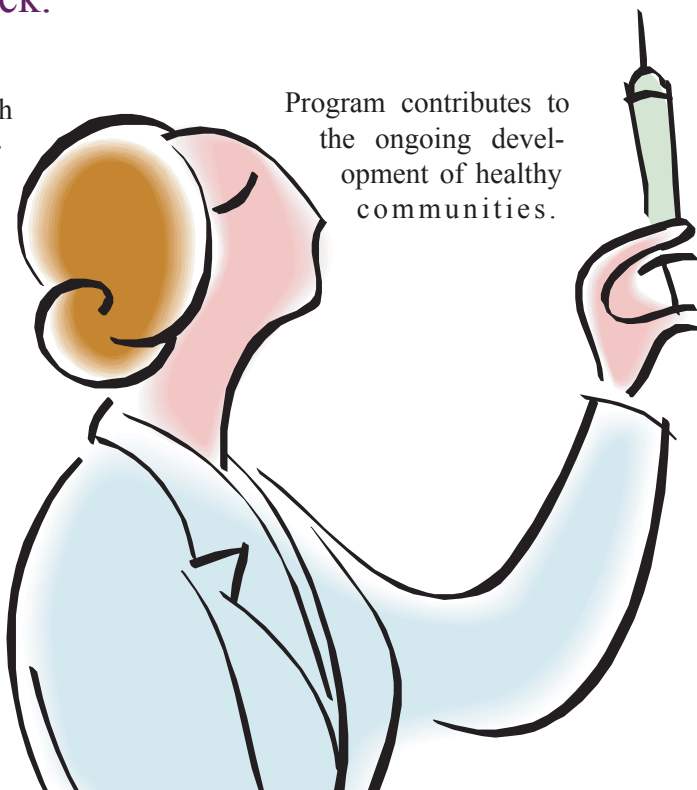
Community Health Centres work together with others providing health promotion outreach initiatives within schools, in housing developments, and in the workplace. They link families with support and self-help groups that offer peer education, support in coping, or are working to address conditions that affect health. The Community Health Centre

Within the Erie St. Clair LHIN there are CHCs (with satellite locations) located in Grand Bend, North Lambton, Sandwich and Windsor. Because education of health issues is paramount to a patient's well-being, CHCs offer a wide variety of programs, classes and groups aimed at specific health risks. At the Grand Bend CHC programs include:

- weight management
- heart health
- exercise
- nutrition (cooking classes)
- diabetes education
- chronic pain program
- and many more

From a consumers perspective, Primary Care is about being able to book an appointment or walk into their health care providers office; receive care that is consistent and in keeping with their medical history; renew a prescription; get a specialist referral; and, come back for follow-up care to ensure their health is on the right track.

Community Health Centres work with individuals, families and communities to strengthen their capacity to take more responsibility for their health and wellbeing. They provide education and advice on helping families access the resources they need from other community agencies. Unlike Family Health Teams who roster any patient who does not have



Program contributes to the ongoing development of healthy communities.

CHCs employ a full team of specialists including:

- chiropractors (foot care)
- certified diabetes educators
- healthy lifestyle/weight management counselors
- health promoters
- family physicians
- Nurse Practitioners
- physiotherapists
- registered dietitians
- Registered Nurses
- social workers

Each Centre may differ depending on the community's localized needs.

In Windsor, a specialized CHC has been created for the community's youth. The Teen Health Centre provides education programs and medical, nutritional and counseling services catering to the teen population. Parents are also encouraged to take advantage of specialized programs for them, such as Raising a Healthy Teen and various parent support groups.

Nurse Practitioner Clinics

The newest model of primary health care – a Nurse Practitioner Clinic – was recently announced for the Erie St. Clair LHIN. Belle River was granted funding for one of three Nurse Practitioner Clinics in Ontario.

The new Nurse Practitioner Clinics in Belle River, Sault Ste. Marie and Thunder Bay will focus on comprehensive Primary Care services, including chronic disease management and health promotion and disease prevention along with other community-based health care organizations, such as public health units.

Nurse Practitioners are Registered Nurses with advanced training and authority to treat common illnesses and injuries, prescribe medication and order lab tests, X-rays and other diagnostic tests. Nurse Practitioner clinics are a team-based approach to front line health care. Nurse Practitioners work with other health care professionals, such

as family doctors, to provide quality care closer to home. These are the first of 25 new Nurse Practitioner Clinics that will come into operation by 2011/12 across Ontario.

The Nurse Practitioner Clinic would take on a caseload of patients who are presently without health care providers and are now using Emergency Departments and walk-in clinics for their health care.

Knowing Your Health Care Options

With a variety of choices for your primary health care, it's important to know what's available and what best fits your needs.

Health Care Connect is a new program to help people find a family health care provider. Ontario residents can call **1-800-445-1822** to be placed on a registry and linked to available openings with Primary Care providers in their community.

Your Health Care Options is a new resource that enables Ontarians to make informed decisions about

where to go for minor illnesses or injury. Knowing your health care options allows you to make better choices for you and your family's health care needs. Go to: www.health.gov.on.ca to explore the different health care choices available to you in your community.

Telehealth Ontario is a free, confidential telephone service you can call to get health advice or information from a Registered Nurse. A Registered Nurse can help you decide whether to care for yourself, make an appointment with your doctor, go to a clinic, contact a community service or go to a hospital emergency room. To speak to a Telehealth Ontario nurse, call **1 - 8 6 6 - 7 9 7 - 0 0 0 0** or TTY **1-866-797-0007**.

In Conclusion...

The delivery of health care is changing and must change to remain sustainable and meet the evolving needs of Ontarians. As chronic disease rates rise and Emergency Departments struggle to keep up with the increasing demand, primary health care providers are working proactively to educate people on how to maintain their health; treat non-urgent health issues; and provide alternatives to emergency room visits.

Consumers are at the heart of this evolution. New Primary Care models are delivering 360 degree health care and ultimately improving the quality of life for all Ontarians.

