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Telepharmacy service instituted in Barry's Bay hospital

Posted By Heather Kendall

Posted 6 days ago

The shortage of health care professionals across the province has made it difficult for small rural hospitals to offer the services needed. For the past 18 months, for example, St. Francis Memorial Hospital in Barry's Bay has been trying to find a pharmacist, without luck.

But it has now solved the problem by connecting with Northern Pharmacy Limited (a division of The North West Company), which offers telepharmacy services.

"A small hospital can safely operate a medication storage and distribution system for their patients under the management of a registered nurse," says Joan Kuiack, Director of Patient Care Services. "However, the addition of a pharmacist offers an enhanced quality of care to our patients."

A pharmacist has the expertise to look at the whole patient, his or her disease and relate the effectiveness of the medication they are receiving to their progress, she adds.

The hospital first contacted Kevin McDonald, manager of the hospital pharmacy telepharmacy program at Northern Pharmacy, about a year ago, but decided to try to organize a partnership with Renfrew Victoria Hospital for services of a pharmacist.

"We advertised nation-wide, but couldn't find a pharmacist and so we went back to Kevin," says Kuiack.

The North West Company is based out of Winnipeg; the Northern Pharmacy provides similar services to hospitals in areas such as Deep River, Cornwall and Moose Factory. McDonald, who hails from Deep River, initiated the telepharmacy project in 2004.

"A hospital pharmacist is very different from a retail pharmacist," he says. "In smaller hospitals, there is not enough work to employ a pharmacist full-time, so it's hard to attract them. We fill that need."

Monique Yurkiw, a pharmacist with the company since July, will look after St. Francis Memorial. She and McDonald were at the hospital last week to test the system.

"It's good," she says. "We're set to go."

When a patient is admitted to hospital, order forms for medications are written up and the pharmacist technician enters the information into the patient profile on the computer, and then prints up labels and dispenses the drugs, which go to the nursing unit. Under the new system, the order forms will be scanned to Yurkiw. She will verify the order, ensure the medication, dosage and strength are appropriate; she can watch for possible drug interactions, misinterpreted drugs, or duplicates.

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"It's really a clinical review," says Darlene Sernoskie, the hospital's director of operations. "She can also look at lab results online. If there is an issue, she can contact the physician or nursing staff."

Yurkiw will work from a computer terminal in her home office in Kemptonville and will have direct contact with the pharmacy technician working in the St. Francis pharmacy. She will sit on the pharmacy and therapeutics committee and expects to visit the hospital once a month. When she comes to Barry's Bay, she will attend meetings, review the pharmacy stock and check batch refills for long-term care patients. She's excited to be connected to this hospital.

"I do some other locations, but this is my site," she says. "I like the sense of belonging, of being a part of the team."

"Monique fits in well," says Sernoskie. "This is a proven system that addresses the national shortage of pharmacists



St. Francis Memorial Hospital in Barry's Bay has solved its pharmacist problem by using a telepharmacy service. Kevin McDonald, manager of the Hospital Pharmacy Telepharmacy program for the North West Company, and pharmacist Monique Yurkiw work with Joan Kuiack, Director of Patient Care Services at the hospital and (seated) Joan Sullivan, pharmacy technician to test the system.

Heather Kendall

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and allows us to enhance the quality of care we offer to our patients. We're excited."

The physicians are also happy to have Yurkiw on board.

"The pharmacist is an important support to the physicians and plays a vital role on the health care team," says Dr. Denise Coulas. "There is no doubt that the right combination of medications is a large part of the treatment plan while in hospital. A pharmacist works with the physicians and staff to provide effective care and a safe transition after discharge."

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