

February 4, 2011

Pediatric diabetes program helps youth in Wood Buffalo

FORT McMURRAY – A Wood Buffalo Primary Care Network (PCN) program is helping youth with Type 1 diabetes manage the chronic disease in their own community.

The Pediatric Diabetes Program was launched 15 months ago and is currently providing support to 15 youths and their families. Previously, many local families would drive five hours to Stollery Children's Hospital in Edmonton, usually four or five times a year, for similar care.

"Families say one of the biggest benefits is that we are a phone call or, at most, a 20-minute drive away," says program lead Farah Ahmad. "It gives parents peace of mind."

Type 1 diabetes, also known as juvenile diabetes, usually occurs in childhood and is a serious chronic condition that impedes the production and/or use of insulin, a hormone vital to normal metabolism. There is no cure and it can be fatal without proper, daily management.

The Pediatric Diabetes Program's interdisciplinary health-care team — comprised of a nurse, pharmacist, diabetic educator, dietitian, exercise specialist and social worker — helps patients up to 18 years of age and their families establish care plans (in collaboration with family doctors), manage diets, understand how to administer insulin and recognize the signs of low or high blood sugar.

Ahmad says the Wood Buffalo PCN can typically meet pediatric diabetics within a day of diagnosis.

"We like to meet with the patients and families as soon as we can," she says. "A Type 1 diabetes diagnosis can bring feelings of fear and uncertainty, so I like to talk with families and let them know how we can help them and how we can work together."

Christine Nagorski, whose 15-year-old son, Lee, was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes in 2009, appreciates the support her family receives through the Wood Buffalo PCN.

"Facing such a terrible disease, like diabetes, is challenging but when you have someone to help guide you along the way, it makes it that much easier," says Nagorski.

"That's what the PCN has done for my family. We now have less travelling to Edmonton, less expenses and individualized care closer to home."

Adds Lee: "I can call Farah when I have any questions. She helps me regulate my blood sugar, diet and insulin pump. I've got to know her well, so I feel I can ask her pretty much anything about diabetes, and she can help me."

The Wood Buffalo PCN offers other services for individuals with chronic conditions, including an adult diabetes program. Established in 2006, the PCN has 27 family physicians and more than 6,400 patients.

The 5-Year Health Action Plan, developed by Alberta Health Services and Alberta Health and Wellness, outlines a strategy to strengthen primary health care which includes helping Albertans better manage their chronic conditions in their own communities.

Alberta Health Services is the provincial health authority responsible for planning and delivering health supports and services for more than 3.7 million adults and children living in Alberta. Its mission is to provide a patient-focused, quality health system that is accessible and sustainable for all Albertans.

- 30 -

For media inquiries, contact:
Stephanie Johnston
AHS Communications
780-788-1758

Rebecca Dunne
PCN Communications
780-793-7202

Primary Care Networks are a made-in-Alberta approach to improve access to, and better co-ordinate, primary health care for Albertans. In a Primary Care Network, family physicians and other health professionals work together as a multi-disciplinary team to increase Albertans' access to the right care, from the right professional, at the right time. They also develop local solutions to local health issues. Primary Care Networks are created through the Primary Care Initiative, a tripartite agreement between Alberta Health and Wellness, the Alberta Medical Association and Alberta Health Services. For more information visit: www.albertapci.ca.