Alexis Creek Health Centre marks 100 years of medical care

ALEXIS CREEK – For 23 years, Mary Engelbert carried a portable telephone so that she was always ready to respond when someone needed medical care in Alexis Creek.

On Sept. 13, the former nurse will be among those who gather to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the provision of health care in the small Chilcotin community, located about 110 kilometres west of Williams Lake. In 1914, the Alexis Creek hospital first opened its doors, and it has remained open in one form or another for the past century. Today, it is called the Alexis Creek Health Centre, and is operated by Interior Health.

“What stories this old building could tell from the last 100 years – from the joy of the birth of a newborn, to the sadness that accompanies the death of a loved one. I am pleased to have been a part of it for nearly a quarter century,” says Engelbert, who retired in 2007 and still resides in Alexis Creek.

Physicians and staff, both former and current, and residents are invited to attend a celebration at the Alexis Creek Community Hall on Sept. 13. An afternoon tea will be held from 1-3 p.m., and there will be historical photos and accounts on display as well as old-fashioned games. Horse-and-wagon tours will travel from the Community Hall to the Health Centre. A cake cutting and recognition event will be held at 4 p.m., with a potluck dinner to follow at 5:30 p.m., when residents and former employees will be invited to share their stories.

“The old hospital has a distinguished and proud history in Alexis Creek,” says Donna Barnett, Cariboo-Chilcotin MLA. “I wish to offer my congratulations as we mark 100 years of medical care for the residents there, and my gratitude to the dedicated physicians and nurses who have served the community over the last century.”

The exact date the original hospital opened in Alexis Creek is unclear. Historical records show that a local rancher named Alex Graham recognized the need for medical care and recruited Dr. William Wright to come to the area in 1912. Dr. Wright set up practice in a small cabin so he could care for patients while the hospital was being built. It opened its doors some time in 1914 and saw a number of physicians and nurses serve there over the years.

In 1949, the Red Cross Society took over management of the facility and it was known as the Alexis Creek Red Cross Outpost Hospital for the next 56 years. In 2005, the Red Cross transferred all its Outpost hospitals to the Provincial Government. Interior Health took over management at that time and it eventually became the Alexis Creek Health Centre.

Today, the Health Centre is open five days per week, Monday to Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., with on-call care available after hours and on weekends for urgent matters. Care is provided by a rotation of two Rural Remote Certified Nurses. In addition, a Nurse Practitioner provides a primary care clinic once per week.

“Health care has changed profoundly over the last 100 years, but what has not changed is the dedication of health-care professionals to provide quality care for the patients they serve,” says Norman Embree, Interior Health Board Chair. “Our staff at the Alexis Creek Health Centre work as a team with our many health-care partners, and I am proud of the commitment they show in providing quality care each and every day.”

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For more information about the Sept. 13 celebration, please contact Mary Engelbert at mengelbert@wlake.com, Kim Mernett at kmernett@telus.net, or Lynn Blatchford at crc@uniserve.com.

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