NEWS RELEASE

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BC Emergency Health Services
Interior Health Authority
Provincial Health Services Authority
Ministry of Health

Community paramedicine program launches in BC Interior

An innovative partnership announced earlier this year to benefit patients and help sustain the presence of paramedics in rural and remote communities is now being launched in the Interior Health region.

Creston and Princeton have been selected as communities in Interior Health for the Community Paramedicine Initiative introduced by BC Emergency Health Services (BCEHS).

“Community paramedicine is enabling us to develop an integrated approach to patient care to best suit the unique needs of each community population,” said Health Minister Terry Lake. “We know that health-care providers in rural and remote areas may face challenges and we value their guidance in how we can best engage local paramedics to address gaps in service.”

Under the initiative, paramedics will provide primary care services within their scope of practice to increase access to basic health-care services in non-urgent settings, in partnership with local health-care providers. The enhanced role is not intended to replace care provided by health professionals such as nurses, but rather to complement and support the work these important professionals do each day.

BCEHS has been coordinating the implementation of community paramedicine in BC with the Ministry of Health, the province's health authorities, and the Ambulance Paramedics of BC (CUPE 873).

Communities in northern BC were announced in April 2015, with Vancouver Island communities expected to be announced later this summer. This measured start allows BCEHS to focus on one health authority at a time, and to develop the contacts needed in each community to ensure community paramedics will be well-integrated members of the established health-care teams.

“This new role in community health is well suited for BC’s highly trained paramedics,” said Bronwyn Barter, President of the Ambulance Paramedics of BC (CUPE 873). “With the community paramedicine program will come enhanced patient care and new full-time career opportunities across the province.”
In phase one, BCEHS paramedic unit chiefs will help confirm the specific services required in the community, which community paramedics, given their training, are able to provide.

It is expected that community paramedics will be delivering community health services in the initial communities, including Creston and Princeton in the fall of 2015. The program will be expanded to additional rural and remote communities across the province in the coming months.

“Paramedics have long been vital partners on the health-care team,” said Interior Health Board Chair Erwin Malzer. “We welcome this innovative new approach to expand community-based care for rural and remote communities in the Interior.”

The Province of British Columbia and BCEHS have committed to creating at least 80 new full-time equivalent positions (FTEs) to support the implementation of community paramedicine programs over the next four years.

“BCEHS is continually striving to find new and better ways to provide patient care and to strengthen its ability to respond to medical emergencies,” said BCEHS Executive Vice President Linda Lupini. “Enhancing the talents and skills of paramedics in a community-based setting will help keep paramedics engaged in remote communities that have low call volumes.”

The Community Paramedicine Initiative aligns with the recently released *Rural Health Services in BC: A policy framework to provide a system of quality care*, which was created as a planning document to identify common concerns and policy directions, and will be joined together into a rural health strategy. This strategy will help guide the future of rural health care for British Columbians.

*BCEHS governs the emergency medical services system in BC and provides residents, visitors and health-care professionals with pre-hospital emergency and inter-facility patient transfer services. BCEHS oversees the BC Ambulance Service and the BC Patient Transfer Network and is supported by the Provincial Health Services Authority.*

*Interior Health is committed to promoting healthy lifestyles and providing a wide range of quality health-care services to more than 730,000 people living across BC’s vast interior.*