

# BRIGHT LIGHTS AWARDS



## 2015

### Building the rural health care team: Making the most of available resources Central Lambton Family Health Team

## Collaboration Leads to Mental Health Success



In rural Lambton County, mental health services were few and far between, despite the fact that there are numerous rural residents in need of treatment for anxiety, depression and other mental illnesses.

The Central Lambton Family Health Team realized that the answer to mental healthcare wasn't to ask their patients to travel to larger centres for treatment, since many of them had no means of transportation and transit generally wasn't an option. The long wait times for mental healthcare in urban centres were simply another reason to seek a local solution.

The FHT decided to revise its programs and processes to improve access to care in Lambton County. In order to do so, the team formed strategic partnerships with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) and the Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry at Western University in London, Ontario, as a way to reach more people in need.

The team encouraged a CMHA staff member to rent office space in their clinic and the result has been a number of shared initiatives. These efforts include cross-training FHT staff to monitor CMHA clients and provide injections to patients who have both addiction and mental health issues – a common pairing. Staff members from both the FHT and the CMHA are co-facilitating anxiety and depression groups at the clinic, and FHT physicians now refer patients to a Rapid Assessment Intervention Team designed to support primary care for youth and adolescents. These services were not previously available locally.

The results have been positive. Injections administered at the clinic to clients with addiction issues are done more consistently, decreasing the risk of patient relapse and hospitalization. In a system where long wait times to see a psychiatrist are the norm for children and youth, prompt care is now possible. This is a real benefit, since 70 per cent of all mental health problems have their onset during childhood or adolescence. Team physicians are working closely with social workers to support patients. In addition, intensive training led by a child/adolescent psychiatrist from Schulich is in progress.

Encouraged by success, the team is working to enhance its offerings, expanding its partnership with the CMHA to make additional mental health services available. Staff is also attempting to obtain increased social work funding from the provincial government to expand those supports, too.