

**BRIGHT LIGHTS AWARD**

  
2012

**Improving Care for People Living with Mental Health Challenges  
Award Winner - Central Lambton Family Health Team**

**Caring closer to home with a rural mental health program**



Petrolia was in danger of losing what little mental health care was available in early 2011. The Canadian Mental Health Association had been sending a registered nurse out once a week to administer long-acting antipsychotic injections and monitor vital signs, but the service was becoming too costly. When the Central Lambton Family Health Team opened for business in March, the association asked the team's registered nurse for mental health to take over the work.

The change has done much more than just save money. Patients now have more flexibility in when they could get their medication, and none has been hospitalized for mental health issues since the team took over. Also, because this service reaches a population that often struggles to engage with medical care, bringing them in to the clinic gives the mental-health nurse the chance to help link patients with other caregivers if needed.

During Central Lambton's first year of operation, the mental health care team, which includes a social worker, nurse practitioner and mental health registered nurse, has worked together with the seven family physicians and other professionals on Central Lambton's staff as well as with community partners and family members to provide client-centred care. They've worked with a spectrum of mental health issues including mood disorders, personality disorders, anxiety disorders, adjustment disorders, thought disorders and dementia, providing assessment, support and help navigating health and social services system.

Teens have benefited from the new approach. After a high number of teen suicides in the community, the social worker partnered with the local high school to see teens that were considered at risk. Sometimes the vice-principal was worried enough to walk students over to the clinic where the social worker provided urgent appointments to assess suicide risk and intervention.

The frail elderly are being helped with dementia assessments; research shows early recognition and intervention can allow people with dementia to remain in their homes for up to two years longer.

The shared-care approach is working well in Central Lambton, because its rural setting means resources are limited. Partners work to try to prevent hospital admissions, and when a patient is discharged from hospital, they provide timely follow up with the goal of preventing readmission.