

**BRIGHT LIGHTS AWARD**

  
2012

**Improving Patient's Experience of Care**  
**Award Winner - Dr. Linda Lee, Centre for Family Medicine**

**Holistic, humanistic care for dementia patients and their families**



Dementia is a devastating disease for patients and their families, but many family doctors lack sufficient training to handle this difficult condition. Linda Lee, a family physician in Kitchener, was concerned about the level of dementia assessment and care being delivered by family practitioners. That concern led her to research and develop a comprehensive multi-disciplinary program that uses evidence-based tools to diagnose cognitive dysfunction, and best practices to provide holistic, humanistic care for patients and their families. The program was launched as the Centre for Family Medicine Memory Clinic, in 2007.

The Memory Clinic increases the capacity to care for people with dementia in three ways. First, it increases knowledge and skills among referring family physicians. As well, the clinic acts as an intermediary, managing the flow between patients' family physicians and specialists, ensuring that only cases that truly need specialist care are referred. Finally, by reducing the burden on specialist care and increasing the efficiency of assessments, it has the potential to decrease waits for appointments.

Research has shown that memory clinics, operating in primary care, can enhance family physicians' capacity to care for people with dementia, and provide timely access to specialized care as well. It also helps patients with mild cognitive impairment, where diagnosis and on-going monitoring allows for early intervention if their condition progresses to dementia. And diagnosing and managing mild cognitive impairment in primary care can reduce the number of referrals to specialists, which leaves them more time to manage complex or urgent referrals.

It is not just patients in Kitchener who are benefiting from Dr. Lee's work. The Centre for Family Medicine Memory Clinic has collaborated with the Ontario College of Family Physicians to develop an accredited, comprehensive five-day training program to help open inter-disciplinary memory clinics in other primary care settings. So far, 34 have opened.