

BRIGHT LIGHTS AWARD


2012

Strengthening FHT Leadership and Governance
Award Winner - Ross Kirkconnell, Guelph Family Health Team

Building the hub for primary care across Guelph



Primary care in Guelph had long been considered disjointed, inconsistent and lacking vision. Local health planners tended simply to ignore it. The Guelph Family Health Team was created in 2006 to bring change, vision and a voice to primary care in the city. Ross Kirkconnell, executive director of the Guelph Family Health Team has brought that transformation about.

Under Mr. Kirkconnell's leadership, the Guelph Family Health Team has expanded to include 71 doctors — almost all the primary-care physicians in the city — and acts as the hub of the system for patients, based on the idea patients across Guelph should have access to the same range of resources at their doctors' offices, regardless of which doctor they have. Unlike many family health teams, which have allocated their resources to centralized programs, the Guelph team is a decentralized model where patients have a "medical home," with a team of clinicians on site to support them. They believe this strategy has led to very high patient, physician and staff satisfaction.

The model benefits patients with improved access and higher quality care, better chronic disease management and help to reach a greater awareness of their role in their own health. Primary care providers are working with improved support and coordination with hospitals, long-term care and community care. The community as a whole has benefited because the primary care sector has become a strong voice, advocating for better services, communication and coordination of care at all levels in the city.

The success of the team is due in no small part to Ross Kirkconnell's outstanding leadership abilities. He is very open and community minded, and a good communicator with great rapport. He is good at focusing groups on particular projects, but also acts well as a point person when quick action and communication are needed. His background with the community care access centre and the Ministry of Health is very helpful as he links the Guelph team with the system.