

BRIGHT LIGHTS AWARDS**2016**

Planning programs and fostering partnerships for healthier communities
Manitoulin Central Family Health Team

Mobile Teleophthalmology Program (TOP)



When presented with an opportunity to develop an Ontario Telemedicine Network TOP retinal screening program, the Manitoulin Central Family Health Team (MCFHT) jumped at the chance to use innovative technology to conduct diabetic retinopathy screening in their rural location.

Manitoulin Island is a remote area, with the nearest ophthalmologist far away in Sudbury. Although many area residents took advantage of annual visits from a CNIB Mobile Eye Van, financial issues, lack of transportation and time constraints prevented others from accessing this invaluable service.

The MCFHT saw this as an opportunity to expand care to people across the island who are living with diabetes, whether or not they were rostered patients, given that diabetes is a common concern for members of the area's population. The program also offered registered practical nurses (RPNs) a chance to put their leadership skills to work.

Since 2014, the program has made timely access possible using a patient-centred approach. RPNs educate diabetic patients and others about the disease, its care and the necessary treatment. They also take digital images of the retina that allows ophthalmologists in other locales to interpret the images and provide timely feedback to family physicians on Manitoulin Island. Those who need treatment or referrals are now able to obtain them promptly.

The program now serves 11 island communities. In addition, many patients who have never been screened for diabetes are now able to take advantage of the program and access care. The MCFHT links these clinics with programs offered by diabetic educators, but each community has the autonomy to design a process that works well for everyone involved.

The program has been so successful that it is recognized by the Ontario Telemedicine Network as a leader in its provincial program and as "the model for all other diabetic retinal screening programs in the province." It now has a full-time funded employee and its efforts to allow RPNs the opportunity to work within their full scope of practice led to MCFHT's recognition as Employer of the Year by the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario.

Today, patients are among the major program promoters. They provide feedback to the staff and have been instrumental, using word of mouth, in encouraging participation. Youth in the communities have learned about diabetes through local health fair exhibits and have helped to spread the word about the importance of screening and treatment.

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The MCFHT has shared its information with others in remote communities. Staff have mentored primary care teams in places such as Moose Factory, Kapuskasing and Smith Falls as they set up their own TOP programs, and, in 2015, they also offered a program orientation to OTN's new program directors. They have also presented at various conferences to discuss their success in screening Indigenous populations.

Key Facts:

- Program addresses the vision needs of rural populations, whether patients are rostered or not
- More than 2,250 screens conducted to date
- Increased annual diabetic screening rate to 82.3 per cent from 50 per cent – it is 15 per cent higher than the provincial average
- 80 per cent of Indigenous patients with diabetes on Manitoulin Island have been screened
- 10 per cent average annual increase in screening rates
- Mentored teams in other remote communities seeking to establish a similar program