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## Telehealth brings the specialist to you

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As Manitoba Telehealth expands further into the rural areas of Manitoba, the service continues to be a boon to the Central health region.

The health service is available in the region at Portage la Prairie, Notre Dame de Lourdes, St. Claude, Swan Lake, St. Jean and at the Boundary Trails Health Centre near Winkler.

“It’s a way for clients to be reached by specialists; that’s the biggest benefit of telehealth,” said Dorothy Wicklund, co-ordinator for the telehealth program at the Portage District General Hospital, on Oct. 21. “A specialist sits in Winnipeg and a client will sit in their rural community and be seen that way, as though they were speaking to a physician across the desk.”

On Oct. 8, the provincial government announced it will spend \$126,000 to extend the service to Virden, Deloraine and Hamiota in the Assiniboine Regional Health Authority.

There are currently more than 60 telehealth sites in the province and First Nations areas. Each regional health authority has at least one telehealth site.

Wicklund noted the service has advantages to bring specialists and their patients together via the interactive video connection, and is effective by providing clinical support, educational access, improved administration and through tele-visitation.

While locations in the Central Plains area, such as Gladstone or Sandy Bay First Nation, do not have telehealth currently, Wicklund said there are hopes eventually they may also be able to have their own telehealth sites as well as other distant areas where the service is not within easy reach.

“There is some discussion about expanding in Central Region RHA for sure,” she said.

“Gladstone is our most northern peak in our region, and there is some discussion of going up there, but there are stages of this development. We don’t have any firm plans to go up there at this point, but there is lots of discussion and lots of interest.”

She noted First Nations communities in Manitoba are operated federally, while telehealth is a provincially-run program. However, there are ways of connecting with reserves.

“We have gone onto reserves to make that connection,” said Wicklund. “Manitoba telehealth is a provincially-run program out of the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. That’s where we are

administered out of, but we certainly have connected with First Nations reserves.”

At Portage District General Hospital on Oct. 21, a telehealth broadcast was held for the delivery of an information talk on infection control.

A group of health-care professionals took in the educational broadcast in a room at the local Portage hospital during the afternoon.

Dr. Shelley Buchan, medical officer of health for the Centra RHA, also attended the event. She noted the telehealth service makes it possible for health-care professionals such as herself to take part in educational sessions without travelling to Winnipeg.

The service can also be used as a way for professionals to exchange information.

“Within the region, we have been able to have senior management meetings,” she said. “It allows me to access educational events without having to travel.”

Manitoba Health Minister Theresa Oswald said the government is continuing to work towards making the Manitoba telehealth program available to more Manitobans in rural communities.

“By investing in telehealth, more Manitobans can connect with health-care expertise closer to home,” she said on Oct. 8. “In communities across the province, telehealth technology is helping link patients with the best care possible.”

abrown@cpheraldleader.com

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