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New Rapid Access Clinic at Royal Inland Hospital improves access to quick assessments for patients

KAMLOOPS – Patients in the Kamloops region who need to see a specialist to receive complex medical, cardiac or neurology assessments have new access to a quick appointment – without needing to be admitted to the hospital.

On Jan. 30, Interior Health opened a new outpatient referral service called the ‘Rapid Access Clinic’ at Royal Inland Hospital (RIH). The clinic is located in the Clinical Services Building, and represents Interior Health’s commitment to build robust, patient-centered specialty programs in Kamloops.

“Rapid Access Clinics are designed for patients who experience a medical issue that does not require a hospital stay, but does need the quick evaluation of a specialist,” says Health Minister Adrian Dix. “When faced with a complex diagnosis, the RIH Rapid Access Clinic provides easier access to specialist services teams that patients count on, decreases the stress of waiting, and will be an excellent addition to this community.”

“In the past, patients whose illnesses worsened had to be admitted to hospital to get urgent medical assessment by specialists, diagnostic tests and care,” says Doug Cochrane, Interior Health Board Chair. “By changing the way we care for complex patients, we will improve the patient experience and address their health-care needs. This change reflects our commitment to high-quality care. It also means more patients will be able to get the care they need quickly, without requiring a visit to the emergency department.”

The RIH Rapid Access Clinic focuses on the specialties of cardiology (diseases of the heart and blood vessels), general internal medicine (prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of adult diseases), and neurology (disorders of the brain and nerves such as stroke).

It is available to individuals who have been referred by a physician or nurse practitioner – as opposed to walk-in services such as emergency departments or medical clinics. Any health-care practitioner can refer a patient to the Rapid Access Clinic, whether they are in primary care practice, an urgent care setting, or at the emergency department, if it is determined that patient needs fast access to a specialist physician assessment and treatment. Patients will benefit by not having to wait in the emergency department or be admitted to hospital in order to be seen by an on-call specialist.

Patients who are referred to the Rapid Access Clinic will be seen within 24-72 hours, evaluated by a specialist, and given expedited access to diagnostics and laboratory exams. In addition to specialist physician support, the clinic will also have specially trained nurses and, eventually, pharmacy services. The addition of the Rapid Access Clinic to Kamloops will provide people with another avenue for care, ensuring that they are accessing the right services within appropriate time frames.

The idea of the Rapid Access Clinic is not new to RIH. The Rapid Access Trans-Ischemic Attack (TIA) Clinic has successfully treated neurology patients for nearly a decade, as part of the prevention services provided through the RIH Vascular Improvement Program (VIP). Last year (2016-17), the TIA clinic had approximately 590 referrals, which is a 26 per cent growth over the last five years.

“Rapid Access Clinics are becoming more prevalent across the country, and they’re proving to be effective ways to speed up diagnosis and begin treatment that will help people avoid hospital admission,” says Susan Brown, Interior Health’s Vice President and Chief Operating Officer for Hospitals and Community Services. “It’s an exciting time – Interior Health has an opportunity to create a service at RIH that will endeavour to be as flexible as possible to meet the needs of people with cardiac, neurological and medical health concerns.”

The prospect of a Rapid Access Clinic has already helped Interior Health successfully recruit new physicians to the RIH Department of Medicine, including new cardiologists. It is anticipated that having this support service at RIH will also encourage new family physicians to begin practising in Kamloops.

“We’re thrilled to welcome our new cardiologists and general internal medicine specialists to Royal Inland Hospital. With their addition, the timing is ideal for RIH to expand its medical services to include a Rapid Access Clinic,” says Dr. Todd Ring, RIH Chief of Staff. “This is not only great news for patients in the Kamloops region, but I’m optimistic it will also help increase physician retention in Kamloops.”

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