

Talk it up Victoria

Renfrew Victoria Hospital | Your Community Healthcare Centre



Volume Three, Number Three

September 2004

Partnering for success with St. Francis Memorial Hospital

At a time when other hospitals are struggling to maintain services, St. Francis Memorial in Barry's Bay is building and thriving.

New programs, new clinicians and even a new health centre have been the order of business for the past five years.

The secret to the hospital's success?

"We found an excellent match," says John Sorensen, a local businessman who spent the past 10 years on the St. Francis board of trustees.

In January of 1999, St. Francis signed a partnership agreement with Renfrew Victoria Hospital.

"The cultures of the organizations are similar and we were both looking for opportunities to enhance clinical service and efficiencies," explains Randy Penney, who serves as the chief executive officer of both hospitals.

He credits the two boards of trustees for their vision and creativity in creating the partnership.

"What we've been able to accomplish between these two sites is really a model," Penney says. "It's been an unbelievable success from a patient standpoint."

Bringing services closer to home

"It was the vision of our board to bring services closer to home," says Darlene Sernoskie, director of operations at St. Francis Memorial. "The growth has been tremendous, and the partnership is still taking us in new directions."

Cathy Pitts, a member of the St. Francis board when the agreement was formed, is still awed by the achievements she has witnessed at one of the province's smallest hospitals in a rural and isolated area.

"We needed an advocate and we needed to position ourselves with somebody who had a vision similar to our own," she says.

She credits the capable day-to-day management of Sernoskie and Jane Dumas, director of patient care at St. Francis, as well as the leadership of CEO Penney.

"He's a 'can-do' administrator who loves to see people succeed," she says.

Sorensen agrees, noting that the matching philosophies of the two facilities provide the foundation for success.

"Both are motivated in a sense of success and in a sense of caring," he comments. "It's all about people and fostering their strengths."



The new clinic in Barry's Bay with, inset, Randy Penney and Darlene Sernoskie.

Local health care connections in action

Among the services the RVH partnership makes possible at Barry's Bay:

- **the Ontario Breast Screening Program**, which screens more than 500 women each year;
- **mammography**;
- **bone density screening**;
- **ultrasound and other diagnostic imaging**;
- **hemodialysis**, for up to nine patients in the region;
- monthly **respirology** clinics;
- **recreology**
- **surgical consultations** at regular clinics provided by Dr. Lance Miller;
- an **internal medicine clinic** provided each month by Dr. Sharon Collins;
- establishing a **fund-raising foundation** that has raised over \$1 million;
- the new **health care centre** that opened last fall housing physicians' offices, a lab, the dialysis unit, Access Nursing offices, and an optometrist's office;
- outpatient **lab services** in the new clinic, relieving the intense pressure on the in-hospital lab; and
- a **new family physician**, Dr. Malinowski, who was attracted by the available office space in the new building combined with a progressive approach to health care in a small community. "He had the opportunity to go anywhere and he chose us," says former board member John Sorensen. "That's just one example of how this partnership has helped our community tremendously. We're proud and we're very grateful."



Diagnostic imaging links continue to grow

Darlene Sernoskie is convinced that diagnostic imaging services are as interconnected as the bones and tissue they examine. As director of operations, she is certain St. Francis Memorial Hospital is now able to offer diagnostics such as ultrasound, bone density testing and even basic x-rays because of its connections to Renfrew Victoria Hospital as an Ontario Breast Screening Program (OBSP) affiliate.

OBSP was among the first clinical services introduced in Barry's Bay as a result of the two hospitals' partnership. It marked the beginning of a flourishing radiology connection.

Today, radiologists from RVH provide weekly consultations with patients in Barry's Bay. They also read the x-ray, ultrasound, mammogram and bone density images that are taken at St. Francis, and provide the necessary follow-up care. A shared ultrasound sonographer facilitates the service at both sites.

If there is an emergency, immediate computer links allow doctors in Renfrew to assess a Barry's Bay patient's condition and direct care. "We try to provide as much primary care as we can there for them," says Dr. David Lyons, RVH medical director of radiology. "People just don't have to travel. It's much easier to get to your local hospital."

Sernoskie says the diagnostic imaging capabilities are a critical aspect of nearly all of the hospital's services.

"We need x-ray for emergencies," she says. "It would be a major problem not to have it."

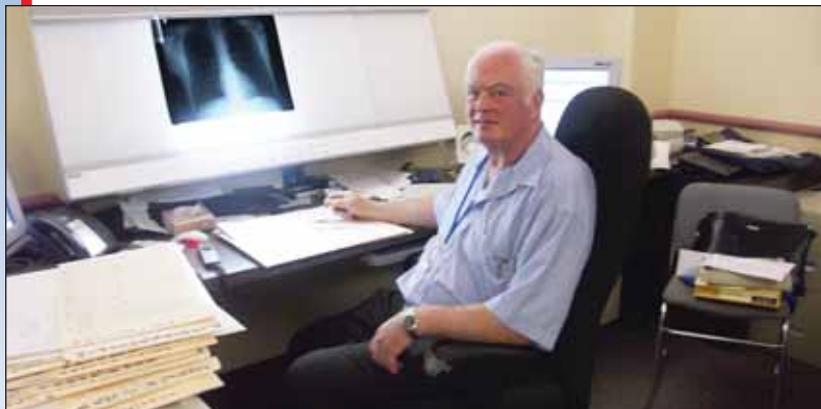
Dr. Colin Cunningham is the RVH radiologist who reads most of the mammograms taken at St. Francis OBSP clinics.

"They wouldn't have things like bone density there without this program here," he says of the supports provided by RVH.

Dr. Cunningham travels to "the Bay" once a week to consult with patients there and provide specialized services such as fluoroscopy, and upper gastrointestinal diagnostics.

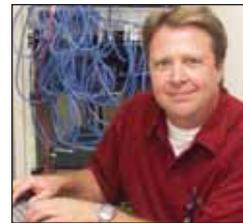
In the meantime, Dr. Lyons travels regularly from Renfrew to Deep River, where a similar diagnostics partnership has been established. He says linking the specialized services at the hospitals makes sense.

The next step he envisages would involve improved technological links to provide health care professionals in all three sites with instantaneously shared images. "That will tie the three hospitals into a really nice network and really enhance patient care," says Dr. Lyons.



Dr. Colin Cunningham travels to Barry's Bay once a week to consult on specialized diagnostic imaging.

The technology behind the connections



Even the best partnerships can only work if there is an open line of communication.

When the connection spans 94 kilometres and involves daily sharing of detailed and technical information, the necessary communication depends on solid technology.

Peter Payton, above right, is the director of information technology for both sites. He says the links in administration and programs at the hospitals would be far more difficult, if not impossible, without today's computer connections.

Payton oversees the computer hardware and software systems at both sites, managing a linked information technology strategy that includes everything from desktop computers to telehealth links that are used for both clinical and educational applications.

With secure, high-speed computer networks and internet connection, health professionals can easily share the information they need. "The Ministry of Health provides us with this free link," notes Payton.

The connections are used on a daily basis, as St. Francis doctors consult with professionals in Renfrew and elsewhere, and staff link with peers for conferences, rounds discussions and other educational opportunities.

The doctors' analysis

Here is what two Barry's Bay doctors have to say about the cooperative efforts between Renfrew and Barry's Bay:

Dr. Denise Coulas, St. Francis Memorial's chief of staff, notes that before the current services were introduced in Barry's Bay it was often difficult to convince people to travel out of town for procedures like breast screening or bone density testing.

"It's made an incredible impact on patients' lives," she says.

Dr. Coulas notes that the partnership has also had a positive effect on health care professionals in the region.

"I've learned more about internal medicine preparing to work in the dialysis unit than I have in my whole life," she enthuses.

"It's given us the mindset that we can do whatever we feel is appropriate for our community. There are no real barriers to us attempting to bring more new services."

"One positive success certainly breeds more."

Dr. Jason Malinowski is the newest member of the Barry's Bay physician community. Before he moved to the area two years ago, he had worked in other small communities where various aspects of health care were not available.

"I was impressed with the amount of services you can get in a place like Barry's Bay," he says.

"I really agree with the philosophy of decentralizing these services and having them available in smaller communities."

"Through what's been developed in this partnership, we know it can be done, and it can be done pretty seamlessly."

Local dialysis improves quality of life

When the satellite dialysis unit at St. Francis Memorial Hospital was launched three years ago, Ed Ruddy was among the first patients to receive its care.

“We are so fortunate to have this here,” he says, “There are a lot of bigger places that don’t have dialysis.”

With treatments required three times a week, receiving dialysis close to home makes a huge difference in patients’ quality of life.

Ed and his wife Alice were able to reduce their two-hour drive for treatments in Renfrew to a half-hour commute from their home in Whitney to the Barry’s Bay unit.

The quality of care remained constant, with the Barry’s Bay satellite unit overseen by Renfrew Victoria Hospital nephrologists Dr. Nicole Delbrouck and Dr. Amtul Musawir.

Computer and telehealth connections allow them to take a hands-on approach in caring for patients in both locations. The nephrologists, for example, schedule consultations with their dialysis patients in Barry’s Bay once a month. If additional care is needed, immediate links are available through telehealth. Local physicians Dr. Bruce Harris and Dr. Denise

Coulas have received special training to support the nephrology team and provide ongoing care to each of the Barry’s Bay dialysis patients.

At the same time, computer links allow the two units to share a dialysis technologist. Tania Scheuneman is on-site in Barry’s Bay once a week, and uses the Smart Systems for Health, a secure computer connection, to monitor the water pressure and water quality at dialysis stations in both sites. From either unit, Tania can immediately troubleshoot any problems that arise with the water system, which is a critical element for dialysis patient safety.

Ed Ruddy says his first couple of dialysis sessions at St. Francis Memorial convinced him that the care was equal to what he received in Ottawa and Renfrew.

Barry’s Bay RN Donna Sullivan says 24 years experience as a dialysis nurse have shown her there are actually many benefits to be found in the smaller units. Through the years, she has provided dialysis care at large centres in Toronto and Ottawa, where the patient list can easily include 200 or more names.



“You never get to know anyone,” she says. “Here, I could tell you everyone’s hemoglobin,” she adds. “There’s much better care because it’s a smaller group to follow, you don’t miss things and you don’t forget things.”

She also believes the personal touch makes a huge difference from the patients’ perspective.

“They’re always seeing the same people, and that allows them to feel more secure a lot sooner than they would among the hustle and bustle of a big-city unit.”

Ed Ruddy nods his head in agreement. The community atmosphere of a smaller unit makes a big difference when you need regular health care, he says, pointing to the man at the next dialyzer and noting, “We worked together when we were young lads.”

Left: Ed Ruddy with dialysis nurse Donna Sullivan.

Barry’s Bay patients can breathe easier with local respiratory clinic

Maureen Magill specializes in helping people to breathe easier. The respiratory technologist dedicates her career to analyzing patients’ oxygen intake and helping them find the best way to catch their breath.

A little more than a year ago, staff at St. Francis Memorial Hospital in Barry’s Bay approached Magill, who works at Renfrew Victoria Hospital, to see if she could dedicate some time to their patients.

Since then, a respiratory therapy clinic has been offered in Barry’s Bay at least once each month. Magill takes new patients through the basics of first-stage breathing tests, assesses the condition of people who are on home oxygen therapy, and coaches people who are finding themselves short of breath.

There are a variety of factors that can affect a person’s

breathing, from genetics to smoking to spending a working life in sawdust-filled mills. Magill’s background and experience allow her to assess each person’s needs and help them find the best way to manage them.

Patients who need more advanced testing or support can follow-up with her at RVH, where more lab equipment is available.

Approximately 15 patients can be seen in each day-long clinic. “When I go, it’s full,” says Magill, who adds that she’s pleased to be able to provide the convenience of a local clinic for people in the western region of Renfrew County.

“Many of our patients live west of Barry’s Bay, so it’s easy to see how much this means to them,” she says. “It just makes sense for me to be there.”

Breast screening was first clinical program produced by partnership

Thanks to the support of the Renfrew Victoria Hospital diagnostic imaging team, more than 500 women in the Madawaska Valley have easy access to the Ontario Breast Screening Program (OBSP).

The program, which is funded by the Ministry of Health and delivered by Cancer Care Ontario, is dedicated to preventing breast cancer deaths by providing free mammograms to women between 50 and 74 years of age. Studies have shown that participation rates improve when the service is convenient and easy for women to access.

"This is an important aspect of women's health care," says Alison Bishop, the Barry's Bay diagnostic imaging program manager.

"We're very proud that we can offer it for women in the Barry's Bay area."

The St. Francis Memorial OBSP program was launched in October 2000, the result of a dedicated effort by RVH Radiologist Dr. David Lyons, Bishop and the rest of the hospital's diagnostic imaging staff.

Marie Villeneuve-Scott, the OBSP nurse examiner at St. Francis Memorial, says having the program on-site makes a significant difference in the lives of area women.

"There's a big, big advantage," she says, noting that at one time local women depended on an OBSP bus service to take them to a clinic in Ottawa. The convenience of receiving their OBSP examination right in Barry's Bay means that more women are participating.

"We also service outlying areas like Bancroft, Maple Leaf and Maynooth, because we're closer for them than the other centres in Belleville or Peterborough," says Villeneuve-Scott.

The Barry's Bay program runs one day each week. The mammograms are done at St. Francis, and the images are reviewed by the radiology staff at Renfrew Victoria. Follow-up examinations, which can include magnification views, ultrasound and core biopsies, are all done at RVH.

Accreditation of both sites by the Canadian Association of Radiologists is an important part of the program. Professional accreditation is a basic requirement for the OBSP program, and involves annual recertification of the nurse examiners, the mammography technologists, and an examination of the mammography equipment twice each year by a physicist to ensure precise calibration.

Above right: RN Marie Villeneuve-Scott and Alison Bishop, program manager in Barry's Bay. Right: Anna Burwell.

RVH was the second facility in all of Ontario to be certified under the OBSP criteria. It achieved the accreditation in 1995, five years before St. Francis became the first rural hospital to offer OBSP services.

Anna Burwell, the OBSP nurse examiner at RVH, says the St. Francis accreditation process benefited from RVH's five years of experience.

"We had everything in line," she says. "Everything went a lot easier than if you were starting on your own."

"We wouldn't have the program without Renfrew Victoria's support," says Villeneuve-Scott. "It's as simple as that."



Talk it up Victoria - the Renfrew Victoria Hospital newsletter

Renfrew Victoria Hospital, 499 Raglan St. North, Renfrew, Ontario K7V 1P6 • www.renfrewhosp.com