






Vaughan home to first community health centre of its kind

Vaughan

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Grand opening June 24 from 2 to 4 p.m.

BY STEFANIA LAMACCHIA

The first stage of enhancing health care in Vaughan will be unveiled June 24 when the Vaughan Community Health Centre (VCHC) opens its doors to the city's waiting public.

Located at 9401 Jane St., the \$2-million VCHC is the first facility of its kind in York Region. Announced in 2006 by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the project called for 22 community health centres to be built in Ontario.

With a staff of 25 and a host of volunteers, the VCHC is now prepared to provide a level of care that brings a welcome change.

"This community health centre is not driven by physicians, it is driven by health promotion and illness prevention," said Executive Director Isabel Araya.

The centre prides itself on being a different kind of health care provider, one that focuses on the needs of their targeted area - youth, seniors and people with mental health and addiction issues.

"We are not here to serve a large number of clients, we are here to serve the most vulnerable clients, the ones that have difficulty accessing health care because of many issues," said Ms Araya.

"So we would rather concentrate on a smaller number of clients and do very thorough work with them and make sure they are OK and are accessing health care, than billing and having numerous clients."

A study conducted in the early days outlined the Maple/Concord areas as those which require close attention given the aging population and growing number of young families, Ms Araya added.

The facility, which has adopted a client-friendly, community centre dynamic, feels more like a recreation centre that happens to provide free medical services. The VCHC's services include family medicine, chiropody (foot and nail care), physiotherapy, diabetes, health promotion, computer literacy and youth programs, as well as a wide array of counselling services.

The centre boasts an advanced electronic system, which allows for digitally interactive information sharing, space saving by eliminating stacks of patient files, and most importantly, it is green friendly.

The VCHC has partnered with organizations such as the Canadian Mental Health Association, Vita Nova and the Seniors' Association of Vaughan Initiative (SAVI).

Furthermore, the centre is dedicated to focusing on the social determinants of health; a modern concept that addresses the daily lives of individuals and the habits they adopt as factors contributing to specific health disorders. Tony Carella, West Woodbridge councillor and VCHC board chair, outlined nutrition, stress, employment, smoking and adequate housing as a few of the common issues that counter healthy living.

"So the question becomes, how do you deal with those social determinants of health to promote the well-being of the individual? This is where community health centres come in ... The idea is to put doctors and nurse practitioners in the frame of mind where they are looking at the bigger picture and seeing what they can do to maintain this person's health, not just cure them when they have an illness [or] give them a prescription when they have a disease," Mr. Carella said.

As the centre's staff is paid by annual salary, VCHC representatives ensure clients will be able to spend the necessary time with their physicians, as opposed to being nothing more than a number on a long list of unhealthy people.

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The VCHC has already registered 600 people. Although Ms Araya is realistic, she is also confident the VCHC's interdisciplinary approach, which will filter clients to a physician who specializes in their particular issue, will allow for easy flow of patients through the proper health channels.

"We cannot serve the whole city of Toronto. We will have 3,000 to 3,500 clients registered with us and I think [caring for] chronically and severely ill clients really makes an impact in the health care system if they are served properly," Ms Araya said.

Clients can register themselves with the centre or receive referrals to any of its organized programs from general practitioners.

The Grand opening of the VCHC, on Jane Street just north of Rutherford Road, is June 24 from 2 to 4 p.m. For more information about the VCHC, visit www.vaughanhealthcarehc.com