





## Ready for healthcare revolution in Vaughan?

By Greg Sorbara and Tony Carella  
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There is a revolution about to happen in Vaughan, and it goes by the name Vaughan Community Health Centre, or VCHC.

We call it a revolution because it represents a fundamental change in the way health care will be delivered within Vaughan. Understanding why requires a bit of history.

City of Vaughan archivists tell us the first medical doctor to set up a practice in what was then the Township of Vaughan was a man named Devlin. That was back in 1867, the year of Confederation. Over the years, other doctors have practised in Vaughan, certainly none more famous than the McLeans — father, son, and grandson — after whom Doctors McLean District Park, set in the fork of the Humber River just above Woodbridge Ave., is named.

More recently, office buildings have been constructed with the specific purpose of providing space for doctors, as well as other professionals. For example, those clustered at the northwest corner of Pine Valley Dr. and Hwy. 7, and the Columbus Medical Building on Weston Rd. just south of Langstaff Rd. While the arrival of each doctor in Vaughan represented an increment in the capacity to deliver medical care at the local level, the opening of the VCHC in a few weeks is a fundamental shift in healthcare delivery. To understand why that is the case, you have to know what a CHC is — and isn't.

For one thing, it is not a hospital (more about that later), if for no other reason than it has no beds. And it is not a walk-in clinic. We have those already. And it is not a family-health team, a relatively new model for the delivery of primary health care in Ontario, and one not yet seen in our neck of the woods.

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The CHC model has actually been around for about 90 years. The first in Ontario was in Sault Ste. Marie, set up about 50 years ago when a local union decided to hire doctors (on salary, as opposed to fee-for-service) to care for its members and their families. Over time, the model has evolved into what it is today: a comprehensive approach to health care targeting hard-to-reach populations, those who for any number of reasons have trouble connecting to the healthcare system. The most important feature of the CHC model is its holistic definition of health: a state of physical, mental and emotional well-being that is determined by a wide range of factors, many of which are hardly ever taken into account when we think about health. For instance:

- Housing: if a VCHC client lives in substandard housing — in premises plagued with mould, for instance — their health can be compromised. So

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plagued with mold, for instance — their health can be compromised. So one thing the CHC does for its clients is help them find decent housing.

- Nutrition: if VCHC clients eat poorly, in ways that could eventually lead to diabetes or obesity, they need to learn what constitutes proper nutrition. Teaching that is a job for the VCHC.

- Employment: anyone who is unemployed for an extended period of time runs health risks. Not being able to afford decent food can lead to nutritional deficiencies, an obvious threat to health. And being out of a job can cause stresses that may have the same effect. So another task for the VCHC is to assist clients in finding employment.

Beyond addressing these broader determinants of health, the VCHC will be providing all sorts of illness-prevention education through its outreach workers, in partnerships with local agencies such as the Canadian Mental Health Association (which will have space at the VCHC), COSTI, Vitanova, and so on. The basic idea is to help the general public understand that health is not something achieved by a visit to your doctor or a stay in a hospital, but something that is determined by choices that we make every day, ones that can reduce the need for a doctor's care or a hospital visit.

Nevertheless, visits to the doctor are necessary from time to time. And the VCHC has three on staff, as well as nurse practitioners, a primary care nurse, a registered practical nurse, social workers, dietitians, health promoters, counsellors, a chiroprapist, community health workers and outreach workers.

Of course visits to a hospital are also necessary from time to time. And that points us to the next big step when it comes to healthcare delivery in Vaughan: the building of our own hospital. That, too, is on the way, thanks to the commitment of the Vaughan Health Campus of Care, with the support of the City of Vaughan.

But that story is for another day.

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