
NEWS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

New nurse practitioners increase access to primary care in northern B.C.

Strong partnerships between Northern Health, Ministry of Health, First Nations Health Authority, municipal governments and communities across northern B.C. have led to the recruitment of seven new nurse practitioners to the Northern Health region, increasing access to primary care for residents.

“Nurse practitioners work in both independent and collaborative practice roles in B.C., providing valuable support to health care services,” said Health Minister Terry Lake. “The addition of seven nurse practitioners to communities throughout northern B.C. complements existing health care services and helps improve access for residents.”

The new nurse practitioners have started settling into their positions. They are:

- Barb Nielsen has returned to Quesnel and Northern Health after working for Interior Health for eight years.
- Shawna Glassel is originally from Kamloops, B.C. and has come to Burns Lake as a recent grad of the University of Victoria.
- Kristan Ellis-MacDonald is a recent grad of Athabasca University and has moved from Halifax, Nova Scotia to practice in Chetwynd.
- Katherina Choka has returned to Canada to work in Northwest B.C. after gaining 17 years of experience as a nurse practitioner in the United States.
- Michael Tantongco recently completed his nurse practitioner studies at the University of Victoria and has brought his background in pediatric oncology to Fort St. John.
- Virginia Davis recently completed her master’s program through University of Northern British Columbia and has moved back to Fort St. John to work as a nurse practitioner.
- Lisa Creelman worked as a registered nurse for nine years prior to completing her master of science in nursing from the University of Northern British Columbia and moving from Chilliwack to Mackenzie to work as a nurse practitioner.

“There were no jobs for nurse practitioners available in the Maritimes when I was looking, so I feel very fortunate to join Northern Health as a nurse practitioner at the Chetwynd Primary Care Clinic,” said Kristan Ellis-MacDonald. “I’m excited to live in Chetwynd as I had been in northern B.C. before and I always had a draw to come back out here because I

found the people very nice, the community that I was in was great, and the environment is beautiful.”

The Nurse Practitioner for British Columbia program introduced by the Ministry of Health has played an important role in assisting with the recruitment of these seven new Nurse Practitioner positions to communities throughout northern B.C.

“Nurse practitioners are valuable members of the health care team that have been serving northern B.C. for over a decade,” said Helen Bourque, lead of nurse practitioners at Northern Health. “The additional nurse practitioners joining northern communities will help us to further enhance primary care resources and delivery of service to the public.

Nurse practitioners are registered nurses with a graduate level nursing degree in advanced practice. Legislation that enables them to work in British Columbia was passed in 2005. All 21 full-time, four part-time and five casual nurse practitioners who currently work in the health authority provide primary care.

“The recruitment of additional nurse practitioners in the North will enhance primary care for First Nations people,” said Becky Palmer, chief nursing officer with the First Nations Health Authority. “Nurse practitioners offer a scope of practice that make them an extremely valued asset for rural and remote First Nations communities, as well as citizens accessing services in the urban setting. We have heard from our clinicians and other partners working in First Nations communities, that nurse practitioners are an important contributor to enhancing care for First Nations.”

Nurse practitioners can serve as a primary health care provider and refer patients to physicians and specialists when appropriate. They are qualified to see patients for acute issues like a cold or injury, follow patients with chronic health issues like diabetes or high blood pressure, provide prenatal care, do check-ups and physical exams, and prescribe medications.

For more information on nurse practitioners, see www.bcnpa.org or www.crnbc.ca.

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