



NURSES *With you every step of the way*

Never a Dull Moment

Primary care nurses take on a variety of roles

By Holli Moncrieff - For the Free Press

Primary care nurses might hold the secret to easing the burden on Canada's health-care system. These nurses support doctors and nurse practitioners by taking an active role in preventative health, chronic-disease management, wound care and reproductive health.

However, their role isn't always fully understood, and they continue to be under-utilized, says Jennie Marshall, a primary care nurse at the Corydon Primary Care Clinic.

"There aren't too many primary care nurses. We're a type of nursing that's really hidden. Our role can be expanded so primary care nurses are in more clinics," she says.

"Having primary care nurses on staff increases a doctor's ability to have a lot more patients on their roster. One of the pillars we look at is preventative health. This is something we're really excited about."

Diabetes management is one example of an area where primary care nurses can take an active role. At the Corydon clinic, nurses run a monthly diabetes class to educate people on managing their health.

"We go through the basics, about the

medication and possible complications, and have a big talk about nutrition and exercise," says Marshall, who has been a primary care nurse for 12 years. "You don't have to have diabetes to attend. We've had families of our diabetic patients come."

Along with the other two primary care nurses at the clinic, Marshall holds Well Baby sessions and teaches pregnant moms about prenatal health.

"The Well Baby classes can be about anything from breastfeeding to normal elimination, home safety, and poison control," she says. "Our prenatal classes are about establishing healthy habits for babies during the pregnancy."

Teen clinics are held once a week. While the main focus is on reproductive health, Marshall says kids can come in for sprained ankles or minor ailments like colds, as well.

"It gives (health-care) providers more time with their patients if we can take this on."

The Corydon clinic takes a team approach to health care, with six doctors, two nurse practitioners, and three primary care nurses working closely together and collaborating whenever possible.

"You need a lot of good communication. We receive a lot of trust from the primary providers," Marshall says.

"We're the communications person between the provider and the patient. We advocate on behalf of our patients."

One of the most challenging aspects of the job is staying on top of new developments in the health-care field.

"It's both a blessing and a curse, how much information there is available. Evidence-based studies are really important. We try to base a lot of our nursing care on them," Marshall says. "There are such a wide variety of situations we have to deal with. There's never a day I'm not learning."

Marshall sees the clinic's clients in person or holds phone consultations with them. She loves helping people take a proactive approach to their health.

"The best part of this job is being able to interact with so many different people on a daily basis. Every day is different.

"We're the communications person between the provider and the patient. We advocate on behalf of our patients."

It's always challenging and it's always exciting," she says. "This type of nursing always felt comfortable. It felt like home to me. I absolutely love my job."

The biggest requirement for a primary care nurse? Being able to roll with the punches.

"The role of a primary care nurse is very different and kind of challenging. You have to be someone who is OK with flexibility and change, and who likes to think outside the box."

National Nursing Week offers an opportunity to celebrate and recognize the many roles nurses play. And Marshall says this year's theme — Nurses: With You Every Step of the Way — truly resonates with her.

"We take care of people from cradle to grave." ●



Marshall uses teaching tools to educate patients about diabetes management.

Photo by Darcy Finley

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