

Nurses collaborate for kids

May 12-18 marks National Nurses Week. Region News is highlighting the work of Calgary Health Region nurses through Thursday.

May 14, 2008

JOANNE ANDERSON
Communications

Children with complex neurological conditions seen through the outpatient neurosciences clinics at the Alberta Children's Hospital often require specialized attention from more than one clinic.

During their visits, many of these kids see a variety of different health-care professionals, including some of the 12 neuroscience nurses who work in various clinics.

Hundreds of kids and families are seen through the ACH neurosciences outpatient clinics each month.

"Rarely are patients in for one concern only — these are usually kids with complex problems and they require services from a number of care providers," says Nancy Thornton, Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS), Pediatric Neurosciences.

Registered nurses working in the neurosciences outpatient area are responsible for setting up clinics and acting somewhat as traffic cops — ensuring patients see different team members for different needs and co-ordinating care and followup.

These nurses often pull the rest of the team together to discuss specific cases and brainstorm best approaches to care.

"The ability to link into a larger, multidisciplinary team allows for a better co-ordination and a fuller range of care," says Thornton.

The nurses in the neurosciences clinics are responsible for a range of services, from intake and triage of new patients to screening assessments and followup.

They also do case management, education and symptom surveillance. Frequently their roles include patient and family counselling.

These nurses have a great deal of autonomy and often work independently.

However they are also parts of larger, interprofessional teams that may include up to 20 or 25 other health-care professionals.

"While we each have different roles with unique abilities and scopes of practice, we are all here for the kids and their families. By working collaboratively, we aim to ensure the best care for those kids and families," Thornton says.

Working together means anything from a quick hallway consultation with a co-worker to providing input to the larger team in a formal meeting or case conference.



Kelly Bullivant, neurosurgery nurse practitioner, Linda Gill, myelomenigocele clinical resource nurse, and Valerie Sherwood, neurosurgery clinical resource nurse, from left, work in the spina bifida clinic at the Alberta Children's Hospital.

“The nurses who are most successful in their roles consciously and deliberately ensure they are collaborative in their practice,” said Thornton. “It isn’t something that happens by accident.”

Aside from the CNS advanced practice role, the ACH neurosciences program also includes a neurosurgery nurse practitioner. This nurse works closely with the neurosurgeons and is available for independent consultations. Because of this, a team doesn’t always need to call in a neurosurgeon.

The ACH neurosciences nursing team recognizes a number of benefits to a collaborative practice environment. By working as a team, the nurses are able to agree on the necessary standards of care and practice which ensure patient safety.

“Like the old saying goes: Two heads are better than one,” says Thornton.

It also leads to more job satisfaction for the nurses.

“It has a ripple effect. When your team is functioning well, it is infectious to others and we feel a tangible difference,” said Thornton. “We want to come into work for the kids and families as well as for the great people we work with.”