

Specialist physicians realize the future lives in Surrey

Opinion: One of the fastest growing communities in Canada

BY ALLAN HOLMES, SPECIAL TO THE VANCOUVER SUN FEBRUARY 18, 2013



Mayor Dianne Watts talks to media outside the Jim Pattison Outpatient Care and Surgery Centre in Surrey on June 8, 2011.

Photograph by: Arlen Redekop, PROVINCE

If you talk to people who work in, or alongside, the health care industry, you will no doubt pick up a common theme related to physician resources — they are scarce and recruiting them is a veritable challenge. The situation is so serious that attracting specialist physicians is often identified as one of the major threats to success when opening a new hospital or adding additional beds to an existing facility.

It is precisely this contextual backdrop that makes what is happening in Surrey so intriguing.

Physicians are realizing that Surrey has the necessary ingredients to be one of the best places to practice the craft of medicine. Indeed, the historic trend that has seen Vancouver be the bigger draw when compared to communities such as Surrey is reversing as I write.

But, why Surrey? Quite simply, it is the patients. Canadians have made Surrey one of the fastest growing communities in Canada. The population growth has accelerated a health care infrastructure investment of over \$750 million just in the last few years. Leading the way has been visionary Mayor Dianne Watts and her team, who are helping physicians, like many other Canadians, realize that, per the city slogan, “the future lives here.”

The specific appeal for physicians, in my opinion, is the combination of a unique patient population mix and the following characteristics:

1. A focus on culture

The major driving force bringing physicians to Surrey is the concerted effort to promote a new culture of health care innovation and excellence. A significant shift is now underway which is seeing Surrey positioning itself firmly among the traditional major players such as Vancouver General, St. Paul’s and Royal Columbian Hospitals.

This shift from its traditional role as a community hospital will see Surrey become a leading academic centre of excellence with enhanced research, academic and educational opportunities. This shift is attracting not only practicing physicians but also more and more physician learners who, once their training is completed, will plan to set up practice in Surrey.

2. The practice opportunities at the Pattison centre

Many physicians have been afforded the unique opportunity to practice in the Jim Pattison Outpatient Care and Surgery Centre, the first stand-alone dedicated outpatient facility of its kind in Western Canada. What is making physicians so enthusiastic about the Jim Pattison centre? Well like the name implies, only outpatients are seen.

Here physicians can focus directly on the patients at hand without the constant interruptions for emergency and urgent cases that comes when clinics are located within hospitals. This allows a cardiologist, radiologist, or orthopedic surgeon to be highly efficient in the delivery of their care. The design of the Jim Pattison centre was heavily influenced by LEAN methodology, which reduces the inefficiencies in patient flow and maximizes the effectiveness of care delivery. In short more order, less chaos.

3. The Surrey redevelopment and expansion project

A major redevelopment and expansion effort is underway in Surrey including the building of an eight-storey Critical Care Tower on the Surrey Hospital campus. This state of the art facility will add 120 beds to the Surrey campus including much-needed emergency department capacity as well as both adult and neonatal critical care beds. This development is bringing some of the latest technology, equipment and care models to Surrey and the physicians are anxiously awaiting the opening of this new facility.

With the population mix that it has, and the traits outlined above, it is no wonder that Surrey has managed to attract some of the best physicians to the city.

And this certainly bodes well for the future, as in my experience, once doctors begin to practice in Surrey, they often remain committed to the region for their career. With an opportunity to raise their kids in a thriving and vibrant community and to practice great medicine, why would they move?

So while many people from within and around the health care industry will make commentary about the challenges associated with securing quality physicians, it is refreshing to have a story like Surrey's to brighten the picture ever so slightly.

Dr. Allan Holmes grew up in Surrey and has spent the last 20 years working within the Fraser Health Authority in a variety of capacities. Recently he served as the hospital medical co-ordinator of the Jim Pattison Outpatient Care and Surgery Center and his current role is the physician resource planning consultant for the Surrey Memorial Hospital Redevelopment and Expansion Project.