

## Madawaska Valley opens family health team



**Jan. 15, 2019 By Chris Drost**

The waiting area of the new Madawaska Valley Family Health Team was full of smiling faces on Friday, Jan. 11 as dignitaries, physicians and community representatives gathered with staff to celebrate the official ribbon cutting for the new family health team. Dr. Alex Otfield, who was introduced as a driving force behind the project, highlighted the fact that it has only been about a year since the application for the new family health team was submitted.

Local physicians have collectively enrolled over 1,000 patients in the past six months and on Dec. 10, 2018, the FHT began seeing its first patients.

The FHT currently includes two nurse practitioners Craig O'Brien and Tierney Lunney who work in cooperation with local physicians.

Recruitment is actively underway for one full-time social worker, a part-time dietitian and part-time physiotherapist, according to executive director Susan Farrar.

Champlain West clinical lead, Max Buxton, said "this is the model that physicians want to work in and it provides the best arrangement that patients can benefit from. It will provide access to services that patients won't otherwise have locally, or what physicians working on their own could not provide. It is optimal for both young and older physicians."

Beginning Monday, Jan. 14, the FHT will begin taking a limited number of urgent care patients for those who do not currently have a family doctor.

Farrar explained, "we will continue to expand our services as our team grows, to provide the community of Madawaska Valley with improved access to primary health care in the future. We eventually expect to be able to help provide care to all patients in need in our local area."

Service covers a wide area from Whitney to Eganville, Combermere and Madawaska Valley.

Funding for the FHT has come through the Ontario Ministry of Health and the Champlain LHIN.

Dr. Otfield expressed his hope that this new FHT in Madawaska Valley will be the start of a new wave of family health teams across the province.

The Ministry and the LHIN identified our community as in need based on hard data, according to Otfield.

Funding came through a new budget line called "Interprovincial Primary Care Funding."

Following the official ribbon cutting and official photos, attendees enjoyed refreshments and cake in celebration of this important milestone for the community.