
Correctional Health Services Update

October 2017

PHSA assumes responsibility for Correctional Health Services Kudos to planning teams and congratulations to all!

After months of planning and collaboration, PHSA assumed responsibility for health care services in BC correctional centres on October 1, 2017. This achievement would not have been possible without the tremendous support and direct involvement of leaders from BC Corrections, Chiron, BC Mental Health & Substance Use Services, and Correctional Health Services, and the Ministry of Health. The patience and commitment of staff were also key elements in the successful launch of Correctional Health Services.

“Our top priority through this planning process was to ensure we recruited experienced staff who are ready to continue this important work with our unique client population,” said Andrew MacFarlane, Provincial Executive Director, Correctional Health Services. “I am pleased that the majority of the existing staff, dentists, psychologists and physicians made the decision to join PHSA. This will help ensure a smooth transition as we continue to work closely with our BC Corrections colleagues to provide quality health care and transitional support.”

Andrew MacFarlane, together with Dr. Nader Sharifi, Medical Director, Correctional Health Services, and BC Corrections Wardens, attended recent orientation days for staff, along with Correctional Health Services Directors, Maureen Sexsmith, Trevor Aarbor and Richard Singleton.

“The move to include Correctional Health Services as part of the overall health system reflects an international trend,” said Dr. Sharifi. “We will build on the excellent work that has been done within the correctional centres to date, and work together as a team moving forward.”

BC is the third province in Canada to include correctional health services within the provincial system of care, and BC Corrections is considered a national leader in pro-social modelling for correctional facilities. The close collaboration between BC Corrections and the PHSA Correctional Health Services teams will support clients in correctional centres and as they transition back to community.

Changes to unfold over time

Other than the fact that Correctional Health Services staff are employees of PHSA, it is business as usual for now. Over the next several months, the teams will work together to implement the new Model of Care, which includes additional staff and a stronger focus on mental health and substance use services and transitional support. The staff orientation sessions introduced staff to PHSA leadership, and explained available resources and administrative processes within PHSA. Guest presenters also shared valuable insight and information with staff.

Presentations were followed by a “Lunch and Learning Fair” that showcased services, supports and programs, and gave staff an opportunity to ask questions and learn from representatives at display tables including: Occupational Health and Safety, Human Resources, Workforce Central, Quality, Infection Control, and the First Nations Health Authority (FNHA) and more.

Following the showcase, Maureen Sexsmith, Director, Professional Practice, Correctional Health Services, and Terri-Lee Seeley, Acting Program Director, Heartwood Centre for Women, conducted a “Learning Café” and workshop on Trauma-Informed Practice. This covered four principles:

- Trauma awareness.
- Emphasis on safety and trustworthiness
- Opportunity for choice, collaboration and connection
- Strengths-based and skill building

Correctional Health Services staff gained a better understanding and insight into how to be trauma informed in the context of a correctional centre. They also learned about how the impact of trauma can be central to an individual’s development. This includes how people cope and survive after trauma, and the relationship of trauma with substance use, physical health and mental health.

Creating a climate for change

Representatives from the First Nations Health Authority were also key participants in orientation sessions across the province. Trish Osterberg, Fraser Salish Regional Director, FNHA, spoke in Abbotsford, and provided an overview of the FNHA vision for health and wellness that requires a balance of physical, spiritual, emotional and mental elements. She encourages staff to create a safe space for clients to talk about what they are afraid of and to keep these conversations open.

Cultural safety and humility were emphasized as a key drivers for change. Cultural safety requires respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the health care system. Cultural humility involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another’s experience. This can be achieved through expressing curiosity instead of judgement.

Moving forward together

The Correctional Health Services orientation sessions provided an opportunity for staff to connect with each other, with their new employer, and with new ideas about how we will move forward together to deliver high quality, trauma-informed care to our clients. Feedback from participants was positive. It was evident from the questions raised and level of participation that Correctional Health Services has an amazing and dedicated team in place to implement the new Model of Care and ensure ongoing collaboration with BC Corrections and health care teams in community.

Contact us

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