

**An award winning
community**

Last Friday, I had the privilege to join some of our community partners on a stage in Prince George to receive another award for our community's efforts to recruit doctors to Quesnel. This is the third award this initiative has garnered: the first was a provincial economic development award, the second was the Union of BC Municipalities recognition of our new primary care clinic, the one we received last week specifically recognized the leadership team that led this initiative.

The team that was recognized consists of Debbie Strang, Northern Health's Health Services Administrator in Quesnel, Doctor Dietrich Furstenburg, Chief of Staff at G.R. Baker (and Dr. Helene Smith prior to Dr. Furstenburg taking over this role), CRD Director John Massier, in his role as Chair of the Cariboo Chilcotin Regional Hospital District Board, the MLAs office, and myself. This small group worked collaboratively to proactively address what could have been a major blow to our community when nine doctors announced they were leaving town early in 2015.

As I told the crowd at the award ceremony in Prince George, when we first learned about the doctors leaving we did not go into panic mode, nor did we seek to place blame by finger pointing at Northern Health or the Province or the City or whomever for causing this "crisis." We also knew we had to avoid a bunch of negative press as a result of this exodus of doctors; our community had just recently experienced a mill closure and we didn't want to give the sense that Quesnel was "dying."

Rather than go into crisis mode and look to place blame, Northern Health and the Chief of Staff at the time (Dr. Helene Smith) worked with us to map out the system issues that had created the circumstances leading up to the doctor exodus. This process involved nearly all of the doctors in the community working with Northern Health to not only detail the issues associated with practicing medicine in a rural community but what innovative solutions might be available to resolve these issues. The solutions-oriented roadmap that came out of this collaborative planning session then became the work plan for the leadership team that was recognized last week.

The lion's share of the work involved in this successful collaborative was borne by Northern Health under the very capable leadership and direction of Debbie Strang and the two Chiefs of Staff who were involved in this initiative, Dr. Helene Smith and Dr. Dietrich Furstenburg. The Cariboo-Chilcotin Regional Hospital District contributed funds to enable the City to hire a health care recruiter (Susan Paulsen, who proved to be perfect for the position and a major reason for our success at "landing" doctors and their families in Quesnel) and contributed capital funding toward the new primary care clinic. The City stepped in to provide temporary housing for some physicians who came to town to keep our emergency room open in 2015 and worked with Regency Chrysler to make vehicles temporarily available to physicians when they first arrived in the City.

Each member of the team and their respective organizations played a key role in the overall success of this initiative and while the major benefit to the community is having a full complement of family physicians in town and a new model of primary care delivery, the awards we are garnering as result of the collaborative effort that led to these successful outcomes presents our community in a very positive light to those looking to Quesnel as a place to visit, live, or invest in.

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