

## **BRINGING PRIMARY CARE HOME**

Home visits mean independence for Nola Tremblay's patients

For nurse practitioner Nola Tremblay, it's all about giving her patients what they want the most: their independence.

"I work with patients to improve their functional status so they can live more independently," she said. "I help them stay in their homes as long as possible, which is what they really want." The Primary Health Care Nurse Practitioner works at the North East Community Care Access Centre in North Bay, and provides primary health care to a home-bound patient population who wouldn't have access to care otherwise.

"These patients are medically complex and have multiple chronic illnesses, as well as a lot of socioeconomic issues," she said. "They are usually frail, and most of them are elderly. They are often prisoners in their own homes."

In a typical day, Nola travels throughout the Nipissing District, which includes West Nipissing, Mattawa, North East Parry Sound and North Bay, and visits 4 to 5 patients in their homes. Her visits range from a follow-up after a recent hospital discharge to providing education on how to manage a new condition to adjusting a patient's medication.

She develops a plan of care with the patient and family members input, reorders prescriptions, and helps manage chronic diseases and illnesses on a day-to-day basis. Nola orders appropriate diagnostic testing, reviews lab results and advocates for her patients as needed, for example by calling their local pharmacies to review new prescriptions and the patient's current medication profile.

NOLA provides primary care to homebound patients without primary health care services, and collaborates with other services including social work, case managers, occupational therapy (OT), physiotherapy, her physician partner, or specialists just to name a few.

"I'm the coordinator of their medical care. I connect all the dots and make sure we have a plan, together based on all recommendations, the patient, caregiver and I decide how to medically and socially address all of their concerns," she said. "It's about helping them achieve the highest degree of function possible while maintaining the best quality of life."

While most of Nola's time with patients is spent educating and managing their respective medical conditions and social issues, she also plays a large role in preventing future complications and unnecessary hospital visits by screening for undiagnosed illnesses, monitoring current illnesses and the patient's response to treatment, arranging for appropriate professional home consults such as an OT, or ordering tests and exams.

It is this holistic and proactive approach that helps to keep her patients out of the emergency department and safely managing their illness at home.

Recently, Nola treated an elderly patient who had end stage lung disease. The woman was complaining of having a cold and was struggling for breath more than usual.

Nola examined the patient and diagnosed her with a lung infection. She then prescribed the appropriate antibiotics, monitored her response and educated her on how she should respond to the medication. The patient, who does not wish to be named, was thankful for Nola's timely intervention and diagnosis.

"I'm so glad I didn't have to go to the Emergency Department. Going by ambulance would have been very hard on me," the patient said. "I'm always afraid they will keep me at the hospital and I won't be able to stay in my home."

When a patient no longer functions at a safe level, Nola develops a new plan of care, which can include transferring them to a long-term care home.

Nola said her role and ability to make a difference is what keeps her going. "I love making a positive difference for patients and their families and allowing them to live the way they want to live, which is in their own homes," she said. "I love the challenge and the uniqueness of every patient. You never know what to expect."