

MS clinic to become permanent fixture in town

A guarantee from the health minister and a \$50,000 donation will ensure the local Multiple Sclerosis clinic is a permanent addition to northern health care.

The clinic, established in 1997 as a year-long pilot project, ran through 12 months of uncertainty in 1998 when it was unclear if there was funding to continue the project, says Ann Springer, co-ordinator of the clinic and a registered nurse.

But this week Ms. Springer says the \$140,000 a year clinic gained full status. On Tuesday the Prince George chapter of the Multi-

ple Sclerosis Society donated \$50,000 to the Northern Interior Regional Health Board for the clinic.

And in January Health Minister Penny Priddy promised to maintain current service levels after a year long review determined Prince George Regional Hospital operates efficiently despite a deficit of over \$4 million. Ms. Springer says these two factors will solidify the clinic's future.

"In that one year (pilot project) we found the clinic's services were desperately needed and that patients are happy to have these services closer to

MSFACTS

- Multiple Sclerosis is a disease of the central nervous system, which causes numbness, loss of balance, extreme fatigue and even paralysis.
- An estimated 50,000 Canadians have Multiple Sclerosis.
- The Prince George Multiple Sclerosis clinic averages 675 patient visits per year.
- The clinic's services include assessments, education, treatment and other services.

home. It also allows us to provide on-going follow up which is essential for this chronic disease," says Ms. Springer.

Previous to the clinic's

local opening, Multiple Sclerosis patients traveled to Vancouver for such clinics. Kelowna also opened an MS Clinic in 1997.

The local clinic, which averages 675 patient visits a year, offers an assessment, education and treatment among other services. It is run by a multi-disciplinary team of neurologists, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and social workers.

Murray Mawhinney, treasurer and past president of the Multiple Sclerosis Society's Prince George chapter, says the clinic, which serves B.C. north of

100 Mile House, is an important addition to health care in northern B.C.

"It means night and day to these people. It's very traumatic to go far away from home and have a lot of things happen that you don't understand," says Mr. Mawhinney who adds his organization managed to raise the \$50,000 through bingo and carnation sales.

Multiple Sclerosis, a disease of the central ner-

vous system, cases numbness, loss of balance, extreme fatigue and even paralysis. The disease attacks the myelin sheath covering nerve fibres of the central nervous system, causing inflammation and edema, destroying the myelin sheath in patches. This interrupts and distorts the natural flow of nerve impulses.

An estimated 50,000 Canadians have MS.

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