News Release – for immediate distribution

May 12, 2018

BC Rural Health Awards honours grassroots healthcare collaboration of Gabriola Island

VANCOUVER – The community of Gabriola Island was selected for the Rural Coordination Centre of BC’s 2018 BC Rural Community Award at the BC Rural Health Conference in Nanaimo, BC on May 12.

The community was honoured for its innovation and resiliency in recovering from a healthcare crisis in 2006, when the island’s only physician – frustrated by a lack of medical facilities and services – nearly left. The community addressed the situation by creating the volunteer-led Gabriola Health Care Foundation, which organized funding and recruitment of volunteer labour to build a 8,500 sq. ft. health centre. The community centre opened its doors in 2012.

Today, the Community Health Centre provides access to three family doctors, emergency care, a helipad for medical evacuations, a mental health nurse, home care nursing, two social workers (community and seniors outreach), a visiting psychiatrist, surgeon and plastic surgeon, home support workers, a medical lab, a dental clinic, and telehealth.

Since the opening of the clinic, the community formed the Gabriola Health and Wellness Collaborative, a dedicated group of volunteers that identify and work to improve social determinants of health. During its first year, the Collaborative focused on the mental health and substance use issues and partnered with the Canadian Mental Health Association and University of Victoria to train dozens of community members in Cognitive Behaviour Therapy. In 2018, the Collaborative will address supports for child poverty and the pressing need for hospice services.

At its May 12 awards ceremony, RCCbc also recognized Dr. Geoffrey Appleton with the 2018 Award of Excellence in Rural Medicine: Lifetime Achievement, while CHANGE BC was honoured with the 2018 Award of Excellence in Rural Medicine: Effective and Efficient Healthcare Partnerships in Rural BC.

2018 marks the fifth year that RCCbc has recognized BC physicians and communities for their contribution and dedication to rural medical practice with the BC Rural Health Awards (formerly the Awards of Excellence in Rural Medicine). Each year, RCCbc recognizes rural physicians within a themed category (e.g., Rural Opinion Leaders in 2015, Outstanding Mentors in 2014) as well as acknowledging long-term practitioners who have shaped and served their communities for more than 15 years. In 2016, RCCbc began to honour the valuable work of interprofessional health care teams in sustaining and/or retaining rural community health services in British Columbia.

A call for nominations was issued in December 2017 through BC Rural Update, the eNewsletter of the RCCbc. Recipients were selected by a committee consisting of representatives from RCCbc and the University of British Columbia. All award recipients receive a physical plaque, along with a $2,500 grant to be used for hosting a community celebration.

The BC Rural Health Awards are made possible through the generous funding provided by the Joint Standing Committee on Rural Issues (JSC). The JSC is a joint collaboration between the BC government and the Doctors of BC that provides policy oversight as well as funding for rural physician programs to increase recruitment and retention of doctors in British Columbia.
Dr. Ray Markham, Executive Director
“RCCbc is pleased to recognize the pivotal role of rural communities in supporting the recruitment and retention of rural healthcare providers. Gabriola Island is a shining example of how grassroots efforts and passion can create substantive change.”

BACKGROUNDER

Rural Coordination Centre of BC (RCCbc) works to enhance rural education in British Columbia and advocates to improve the health of rural BC residents.

Working at the direction of the JSC, and in collaboration BC’s health authorities, post-secondary institutions, practitioners, and rural communities, RCCbc identifies gaps and overlaps in rural services throughout the province and creates initiatives to address shortfalls. It works to increase and sustain recruitment and retention of rural healthcare professionals to BC and to provide high quality, in-community healthcare to rural British Columbians.

Joint Standing Committee on Rural Issues (JSC) is a BC-based entity that includes representation from the Doctors of BC, the Ministry of Health, and health authorities. The JSC advises the BC Government and the Doctors of BC on matters pertaining to rural medical practice and develops programs and policies for BC’s rural physicians.

ADDENDA

A PDF with the submitted biographies of all 2018 BC Rural Health Awards winners is available upon request.

Photographs of the award winners from the May 12 ceremony are available upon request.