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## MEDIA RELEASE

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### *Mental Health Providers Meet to Network*

Four Counties Health Services (FCHS) was the site today for a first ever networking meeting for local mental health care providers. "We are using new Telehealth technology at Four Counties; we wanted an opportunity to introduce that and talk with our peers about ways we can work together in providing mental healthcare services in this area," Lynda Robinson, Director of Patient Care at FCHS, says.

Rural healthcare, especially mental health services, faces unique challenges. "Today's meeting is an opportunity for all of us to come together - learn what services each organization provides, how each refers, what populations they serve - and how we can support each other in this," Robinson says. The FCHS serves a catchment area comprising the counties of Elgin, Kent, Lambton, Middlesex and within each county are many healthcare providers and organizations each with its own mandate.

One new service that FCHS wants peers - and residents - to know about is the availability of the Ontario Telemedicine Network (OTN) at Four Counties. The OTN is an independent, not-for-profit organization funded by the province and available at more than 650 sites in the province.

Through using this technology, a patient can access off-site services, including psychiatric counselling, via the two-way videoconferencing system. The patient's TeleHealth visit takes place in a private room with an "I-doc" - basically a 2-way video-conferencing system monitor. Also present for the consultation is the on-site primary care provider, Lisa Plank, who is a Nurse Practitioner.

FCCHS started providing Telemental Health care last November, welcoming Dr. R. Chandrasena, chief of psychiatry at Chatham-Kent Health Alliance, and Dr. R. Fairbairn to the Middlesex Hospital Alliance (MHA) team of physicians.

The addition of this service at FCCHS is a great benefit to the community - reducing wait times for a psychiatric consultation and eliminating the need to travel to Chatham or London for consultation, Plank says, "Telemental health services improves patient access to care; it improves the opportunity for follow-up care and provides continuity of care close to the patient's home."

Telemedicine minimizes the time lost in travel for both patients and clinicians. According to a 2008 patient satisfaction survey conducted by OTN, 97% of patients were satisfied with their telemedicine visit and 94% would recommend telemedicine to family or friends.

Initially, patients seeking mental health services meet first with nurse-practitioner Plank RN (EC), then follow up by videoconference with one of the psychiatrists. At this time, crisis services are not available through Telepsychiatry.

"We started the program in November with a single room and our existing I-doc," Robinson says. "We have another room being developed and have just received another, newer I-doc with additional capabilities that allows not only two-way videoconferencing but also has tele-diagnostic instruments for monitoring blood pressure and heart rate, for instance, and which will also be useful for other types of TeleHealth consults."