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MEDIA RELEASE

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*For more information
contact:*

Michael Mazza
Chief Executive Officer
519 245-5295 ext. 5592

First Nations Cultural Awareness at Four Counties

The Middlesex Hospital Alliance Four Counties site kicks off National Nursing Week today with a special lunch welcoming Barb Whiteye, Regional Diabetes Worker from Southern Ontario Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative (SOADI), Western Region.

“The relationship between Four Counties, especially our Diabetes Education Centre, and the First Nations people is very important and has been building since we were asked to work with SOADI on diabetes education programming last year,” Mike Mazza, CEO of Middlesex Hospital Alliance, says. Today’s learning lunch opportunity expects approximately 30 people to attend, including many nurses. This week also marks National Nursing week, an opportunity to celebrate the unique contributions of both the nursing profession and individual nurses.

Nurses are in the frontlines of the battle against the epidemic of diabetes. The Diabetes Education Centre at Four Counties Health Services (FCHS) experienced a 347 percent increase in patient load in the last year. “Now, one in eleven Canadians has the disease,” Alison Lenny, Diabetes Educator at FCHS, says.

Diabetes is a serious disease. It can cause blindness, serious kidney disease, heart disease and shorten your life. Diabetes can be managed – through lifestyle choices, medication and blood glucose testing – to reduce the risk of serious complications. Learning how to manage the disease is one of the major roles played by the Middlesex Hospital Alliance’s Diabetes Education Centre. “Support, education and care are the three key areas of the programming,” Mazza says.

The program provides both individual and group sessions where people with diabetes can share knowledge and have their questions answered about important management tools such as food choices, exercise and monitoring. And, the DEC offers group classes on specific topics such as label reading, carbohydrate counting and weight control.

Alison Lenny, Diabetes Educator at Four Counties says Canadian aboriginal communities are particularly at risk for developing diabetes and for suffering higher rates of complications. "According to a recent Health Council of Canada report, an estimated 20 per cent of First Nations adults have diabetes and rates tend to be highest among people living on-reserve."

The report says that depending on the age group, First Nations people are two to eight times more likely to have diabetes than the Canadian population in general, and diabetes is growing much more quickly in First Nations communities.

"We have been increasing our relationship with First Nations people through our Diabetes Education Centre (DEC) and working with SOADI," Lenny says. "The DEC has been collaborating with local First Nations communities such as Walpole Island and Moravian of the Thames. We have been assisting with programming on the reserves and some aboriginal residents have also been coming to Four Counties for appointments with our Diabetes Educators. This luncheon will give us a chance to meet people from Oneida and Munsee also. And, we will have an opportunity to better understand issues of cultural sensitivity," Lenny says.

Barb Whiteye, Regional Diabetes Worker from Southern Ontario Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative (SOADI), Western Region will be making a lunch time cultural awareness presentation on the Ribbon of Life.

"The workshop participants will gain understanding of aboriginal struggles, trials and triumphs with diabetes through assembling a Ribbon of Life," Whiteye says. The Ribbon of Life was recently designated as the First Nations emblem for diabetes. It comprises coloured ribbons, beads and knots that represent phases in life's journey and the impact of diabetes. "When we craft this Ribbon, each component has a meaning. The four colours of ribbon for example, represent the four seasons because diabetes is with us always and they represent four aspects of human nature: spiritual, emotional, physical and mental."