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*For more information
contact:*

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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

Diabetes Education Centre Official Opening - FCHS Site

The recently renovated and expanded Diabetes Education Centre at Middlesex Hospital Alliance's (MHA) Four Counties site welcomed guests to its Open House today.

A Ribbon Cutting was held in the morning followed by an Open House, with refreshments, musical entertainment from harpist Jan Earnshaw, and tours of the new Diabetes Education Centre suite.

The Middlesex Hospital Alliance's Diabetes Education Centre (DEC) has locations at both Four Counties and the Strathroy sites. The Centre is staffed by Diabetes Educators, who are registered nurses and registered dietitians. "Support, education and care are the three key areas of the programming," Mike Mazza, CEO of MHA, says.

Diabetes is a world wide epidemic. In Canada, one in eleven has the disease. And, this epidemic is being felt in our area too. The Diabetes Education Centre at Four Counties Health Services (FCHS) experienced a 311 percent increase in patient visits in the last year, according to Dr. Phil Vandewalle, MHA's medical advisor to the DEC.

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 DEC. 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," Dr. Vandewalle says. "We have even offered clinics in Portuguese to communicate comfortably with some members of the Strathroy community," he adds.

Alison Lenny, program manager of the DEC, welcomed guests to the new DEC and thanked event sponsors Bayer and Novo Nordisk. The new DEC is located just inside the front doors of Four Counties. The new area is a suite with a reception area, an office for the educators and a

large sunlit classroom that can accommodate 30 people. “The new suite is entirely wheelchair accessible,” Lenny says. The classroom also has a projector and screen for presentations and equipment such as a refrigerator, countertops and blenders, for food preparation demonstrations. And, the new space comes with a new local phone number: 519-693-4441 ext. 2489. “It’s an advantage to our clients to have an onsite classroom and the equipment to now do cooking demonstrations. We didn’t have any of these benefits before,” Lenny says.

Mike Mazza, CEO of the MHA, spoke about DEC’s role in the wider community. “Recently, a new relationship has been developing; that between Four Counties, especially our Diabetes Education Centre, and the First Nations people. This important relationship has been building since MHA’s DEC was first asked to work last year with Southern Ontario Aboriginal Diabetes Initiative (SOADI) on diabetes education programming.”

Canadian aboriginal communities are particularly at risk for developing diabetes and for suffering higher rates of complications. Says Mazza, “Last month, DEC hosted a very successful and educational Cultural Awareness luncheon with representatives from SOADI. They introduced us to The Ribbon of Life – the designated First Nations emblem for diabetes.”