THE ISSUE

“The number of seniors with dementia in Saskatchewan is expected to nearly double in the next 30 years—from 17,000 now to 29,000 in 2038,” says Debra Morgan, Chair of Rural Health Delivery at the U of S’s Canadian Centre for Health and Safety in Agriculture.

These numbers are especially important to rural communities which have a higher proportion of seniors than do cities but, in comparison, markedly fewer speciality services for dementia. Instead, patients must make multiple round trips to Saskatoon for appointments with specialists and for testing. Diagnosis can take up to a year.
THE CLINIC

"Working in partnership with rural health care providers and with in-kind support from Telehealth Saskatchewan, we designed the Rural and Remote Memory Clinic that uses videoconferencing and other innovations to improve access to diagnostic and treatment services for rural patients and their families," says Morgan.

The clinic integrates interprofessional clinical service, research and training. It provides access to assessment, diagnosis, and management of early stage dementia, and includes culturally appropriate protocols for assessing aboriginal seniors.

Once referred by their family physician, patients make one trip to be assessed by a neurologist, neuropsychology team, geriatrician and physical therapist. Family members are encouraged to attend so that the medical team can assess their psychological health and their capacity to handle the patient’s care. After the assessment, patients and family members meet the neurologist and neuropsychologist to discuss the diagnosis, management and care.

Pre-clinic assessments and follow-up appointments are all done via videoconference from their home community, saving an average of 440 kilometres per round trip compared to driving to Saskatoon.

THE IMPACT

Patients and their families give the clinic rave reviews. As well, surveyors from the Canadian Council on Health Services Accreditation have noted it as an excellent model of care within the Saskatoon Health Region.

The clinic is featured in a short film commissioned by the Canadian Dementia Knowledge Translation Network as an example of best practices in dementia care, and it has been included in a Lancet Neurology review of innovations in telemedicine.

THE FUTURE

Morgan’s Applied Chair in Health Services and Policy Research, co-funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation, will allow her to continue her research for the next five years and further advance dementia diagnosis and treatment for people living in rural and remote communities.

“The clinic provides a model of interprofessional patient-centred collaborative care, interprofessional education, interdisciplinary research and knowledge exchange, and capacity development for rural healthcare providers,” she says.

“It’s a model that could be used to serve other chronic conditions in rural and remote areas in Saskatchewan, all over Canada and even abroad.”

For more information on Morgan’s work, visit: http://www.cchsa-ccssma.usask.ca/people/d_morgan.php