What is Shared Mental Health Care?

“Shared Care” is a mental health program that involves family physicians working collaboratively with mental health counsellors and psychiatrists. The goal of this collaborative model is to assist individuals with mental health difficulties to access mental health services in a timely manner and to provide that care within the familiarity of their Family Physician’s office.

How does Shared Mental Health Care work?

Access to Shared Care services begins when a Family Physician identifies the fact that their client is experiencing mental health difficulties. In these situations, the clinician may refer the person to a mental health counsellor or a psychiatrist. The doctor, counsellor and/or the psychiatrist will then work together with the person to identify the support and assistance they need to achieve their health goals.

Where possible, the doctor, counsellor and/or psychiatrist work in the same office or clinic, so all services can be offered from the same location.

What are some reasons that a person might be referred to a Shared Mental Health Care counsellor or psychiatrist?

There are many reasons that a person may be referred to a mental health counsellor including:

- Feelings of depression or sadness
- Problems with alcohol and drugs
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Relationship and parenting problems
- Experiences of grief and loss
- Feelings of anxiety
- Conflict at home
- Low self esteem
- Difficulty coping with stress
- Difficulties at work or school

A person’s mental health and emotional wellbeing are influenced by a number of challenges including: life experiences, ability to cope, financial security, the availability of social supports, housing and access to health care.

Do mental health counsellors and psychiatrists offer the same services?

Typically, a mental health counsellor provides individual, family or group counselling depending on the needs of the individual. Services are short-term and time-limited. A psychiatrist provides assessment and consultation to the Family Physician around treatment for those who need specialized mental health care.