

AVI ENTERPRISES SOCIETY

AVI Health Centre
ANNUAL REPORT

APRIL 1, 2008 – MARCH 31, 2009

Prepared by Dana Becker

Clinic offers HIV care

New service intended to remove barriers for central Vancouver Island residents

BY RACHEL STERN
THE NEWS BULLETIN

People with HIV who don't have a family doctor can now get help at the free care clinic at AVI Health Centre in Nanaimo.

The clinic is meant to help remove barriers, said Dana Becker, manager of the centre. She said the HIV specialists are in Victoria and Vancouver and some people can't travel to those locations easily or cost effectively.

"By providing an HIV care clinic here, we're able to do what we do best - meet people wherever they're at in their life," said Becker.

"We're here for everyone, including all populations - gay, straight, IV drug users, young or old."

The AVI Health Centre has been open since 2003 and helps provide methadone maintenance for people addicted to opiates, helps them stop using drugs by injection and provides Hepatitis C treatment.

"Our goal here is to reduce the risk of transmission of HIV, Hepatitis C and other harm that may be caused by injection drug using - it's harm reduction," said Becker.

She said over the years, staff and doctors at the centre have noticed a number of people using the clinic who didn't have access to medical care and decided to create the clinic.

A year ago, a Vancouver specialist came once a month to treat HIV patients, but couldn't continue the service. The three clinic physicians decided to provide the care, as many were already treating patients with HIV.

Becker said the doctors have a special interest in addiction, Hepatitis C, HIV and mental health and will refer patients to the local infectious disease specialist if needed.

"HIV care is complicated and when it is in the context with people with substance abuse issues and poverty,



RACHEL STERN/THE NEWS BULLETIN

Dana Becker, manager of the AVI Health Centre, discusses HIV information. The centre is now offering a free HIV Care Clinic every first Thursday of the month.

then it is beyond the practice of most family medical doctors," said Dr. Mary Winder, who works at the clinic.

"The clinic provides a necessary service for people who can't get care in Nanaimo otherwise."

Becker said the clinic will help screen people, get their weight checked and make sure blood work is sent to the lab in a respectful and non-judgmental setting.

The service is free for people covered by B.C. medical. For someone not covered by B.C. medical, Becker said the clinic makes an effort to see them as well.

The clinic is treating people from around central Vancouver Island and already has clients from Campbell River, Courtenay, Ladysmith and Nanaimo.

The HIV Care Clinic is the first Thursday of each month from 1-5 p.m. at AVI Health Centre, 216-55 Victoria Rd. People can make an appointment by calling 250-754-9111.

Becker said people can also drop by to get to know the staff so they feel more comfortable before the appointment. The centre is open Monday to Wednesday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

reporter3@nanaimobulletin.com

*The AVI Health Centre Report
April 1, 2008 – March 31, 2009*

Overview

The Health Centre continues to fulfill the goal of providing wellness resources and harm reductions strategies for people who use opiates thus reducing the risk of spread of HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C. We provide Hepatitis C treatment that includes education and support components, and in this past year have now provide HIV treatment and care.

Website

AVI Health Centre has a website that is a valuable resource for professionals, physicians and potential clients and is visited often. www.avihealthcentre.org

Patients

As of the end of March 2009 we have 185 registered methadone clients. This number is reflected on the Total Methadone Patients (since 2004) **chart #1**.

We have a turnaround of approximately 8 or 9 patients a month so we are able to accept new patients on a limited basis. Fortunately there is a private methadone clinic in this building and we can confidently refer those we are not able to see quickly.

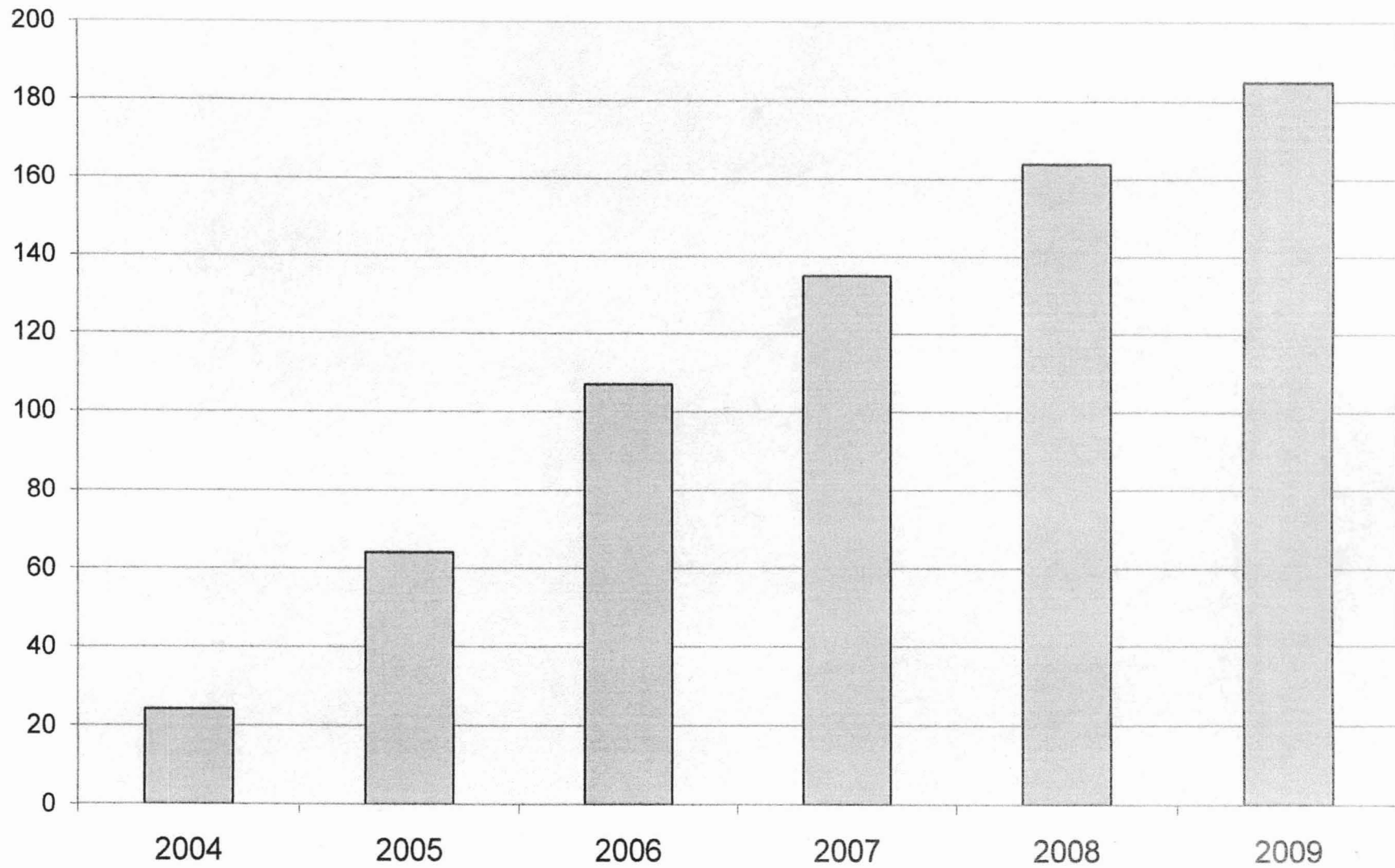
People are referred to us for Methadone, Hepatitis C and HIV, through local physicians, pharmacists, correctional centres, themselves, and through word of mouth.

Counselling

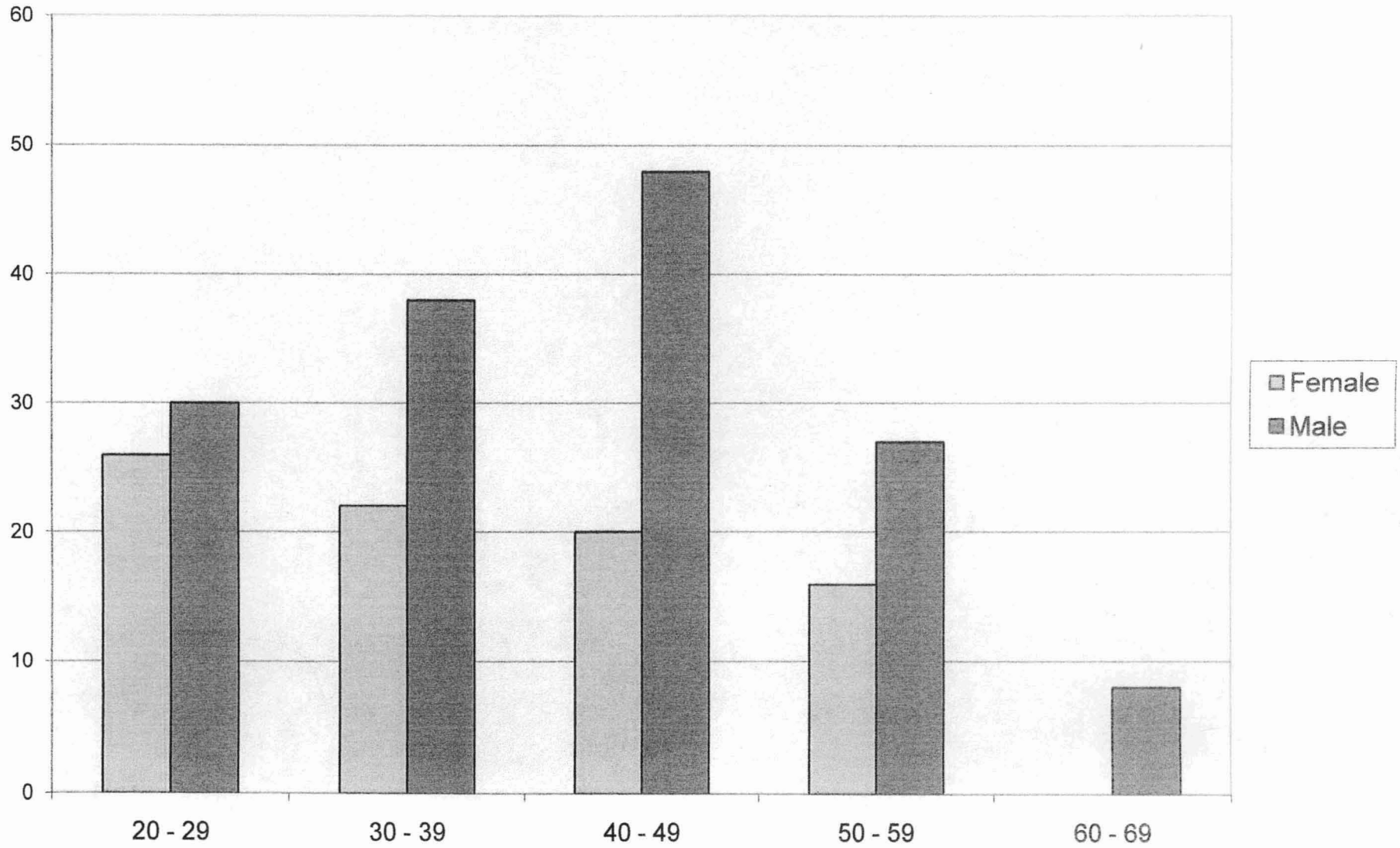
Our addictions counsellor remains working two full days a week. We have a consistent number of long-term clients who have committed themselves to regular, ongoing, long term counselling and support. This has proven valuable for these clients, as many would have succumbed to their addictions if support and counselling were not available on a regular basis.

These clients are more stable, on the whole, than at any other time in their lives. Much of the work is motivational, with some in-depth work on multiple past traumas and goal development regarding schooling or work.

Total AVI Health Centre Methadone Patients



Methadone - Age Gender Chart 2008- 2009



Another group of clients continue to use the counselling services on a sporadic, more crisis oriented basis. This work is more harm reduction based aimed at producing longer periods of drug abstinence and or decreasing harm. The age and gender of our clients can be viewed on **Chart#2**.

Hepatitis C Program

Our Hepatitis C nurse is a very important piece of our service. The cooperation and joint planning between physicians, nurse and counsellor is valued by clients, and has created additional successes for clients in both Hep C treatment and addiction treatment. At any given time we have up to 10 patients receiving Hepatitis C treatment through the Health Centre.

The AVI Health Centre receives financial support from both Roche Pharmaceuticals (Pegasus) and Schering Pharmaceuticals (Pegatron). Last year we received a total of \$27,500 from the Pharmaceutical Companies, no strings attached, to assist us in providing treatment, education and support for folks living with Hepatitis C. At this point we use the funds to pay some wages for both the Nurse and the Medical Office Assistant.

Hepatitis C Studies

- **The Pegatron Redipen Prospective Optimal Weight-Based Dosing Response Program**

“the use of the PEGETRON REDIPEN, a new and improved delivery system for PEGETRON, will improve patient compliance and increase the number of patients with a sustained viral response, defined as an absence of HCV/RNA in serum, 6 months following end of treatment.”

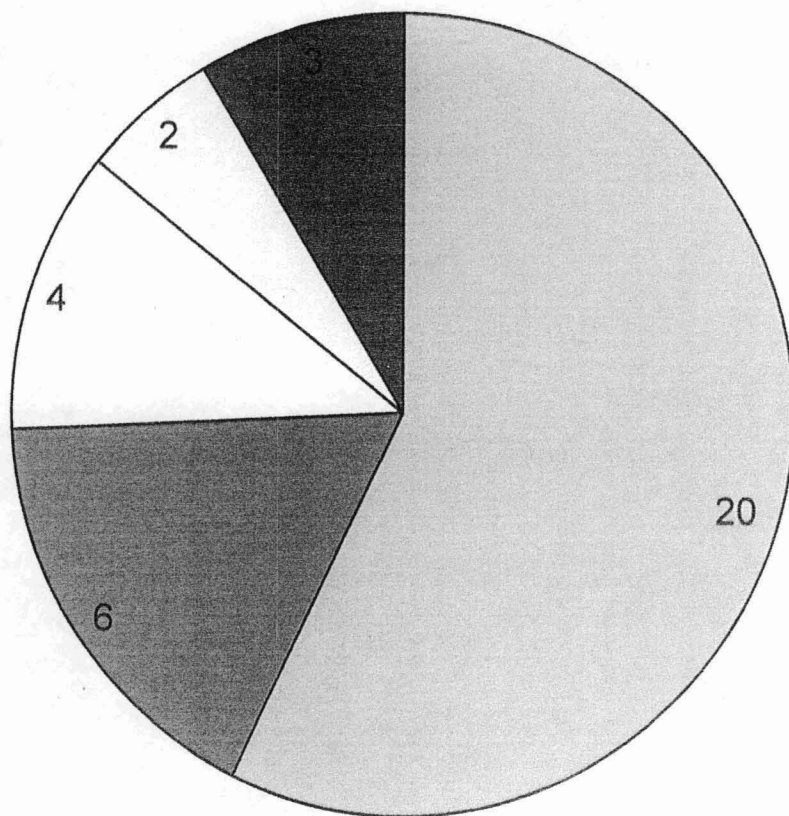
The AVI Health Centre is compensated for each form, (4 for each patient over the course of their 6 month treatment) that is completed and faxed to Schering.

- **HI Lo Study – Pender Street Clinic**

We are actively participating in a Study Evaluating a Multi Disciplinary Approach for the Treatment of Hepatitis C in Injection Drug User’s, comparing high and low intensity delivery programs through Dr. Conway UBC, Downtown Infection Disease Clinic. 4 Canadian Clinics will be participating in this study, 1) VANCOUVER - Pender Community Health Clinic, 2) Yale Medical Centre, 3) VICTORIA – Cool-Aid Community Health Centre, 4) NANAIMO - AVI Health Centre. This will be a

Hepatitis C Treatment - AVI Health Centre

Total 35 patients 2005-2009



- Negative
- Positive
- Discontinued
- Results Pending
- Current

published study when completed. We are very excited about participating in this formal study.

- **The Prophesys Study** - F. Hoffman-La Roche Ltd.

Prospective observational study on predictors of early on-treatment response and sustained virological response in a cohort of treatment naïve HCV-infected patients treated with pegylated interferons. HCV RNA titers are assessed prior to treatment, after 2, 4, 12 weeks of treatment and at the end of treatment as well as 12 and 24 weeks after the end of treatment.

There are approximately 300 centres enrolling patients from France, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, Sweden, Romania, and Hungary.

The AVI Health Centre is compensated at stages throughout the study and shares those payments with the treating physician and nurse.

Please see **Charts #3** for a look at our Hepatitis C treatment program.

HIV Care

History

In Feb 2008 after seeing the announcement of our new website, Dr. Brian Conway offered to come from the Downtown Infectious Diseases Clinic in Vancouver and provide specialist support for HIV/HCV/ID at the AVI Health Centre. He started at the AVI Health Centre in April 2008 and attended monthly thereafter until January 2009. Soon after he started we realized that he was recruiting patients for HIV treatment studies that we knew well, and had reservations about their suitability and ability to consistently comply with treatment in the studies. We developed a protocol for Dr. Conway to follow that we felt would optimize the delivery of care to our patients. In January 2009 it was clear that Dr. Conway's adherence to our study protocol was not being honored. Thus, in Jan 09 we asked him to stop study recruitment altogether, and provide specialist support only as was originally agreed early in 2008. I approached our docs and asked them if they would be willing to take on the HIV care and work 4 days each year to satisfy the demand for a monthly clinic. They agreed! On March 17th, a letter of thanks and also news of our plan to provide our own HIV care was sent to Dr. Conway.

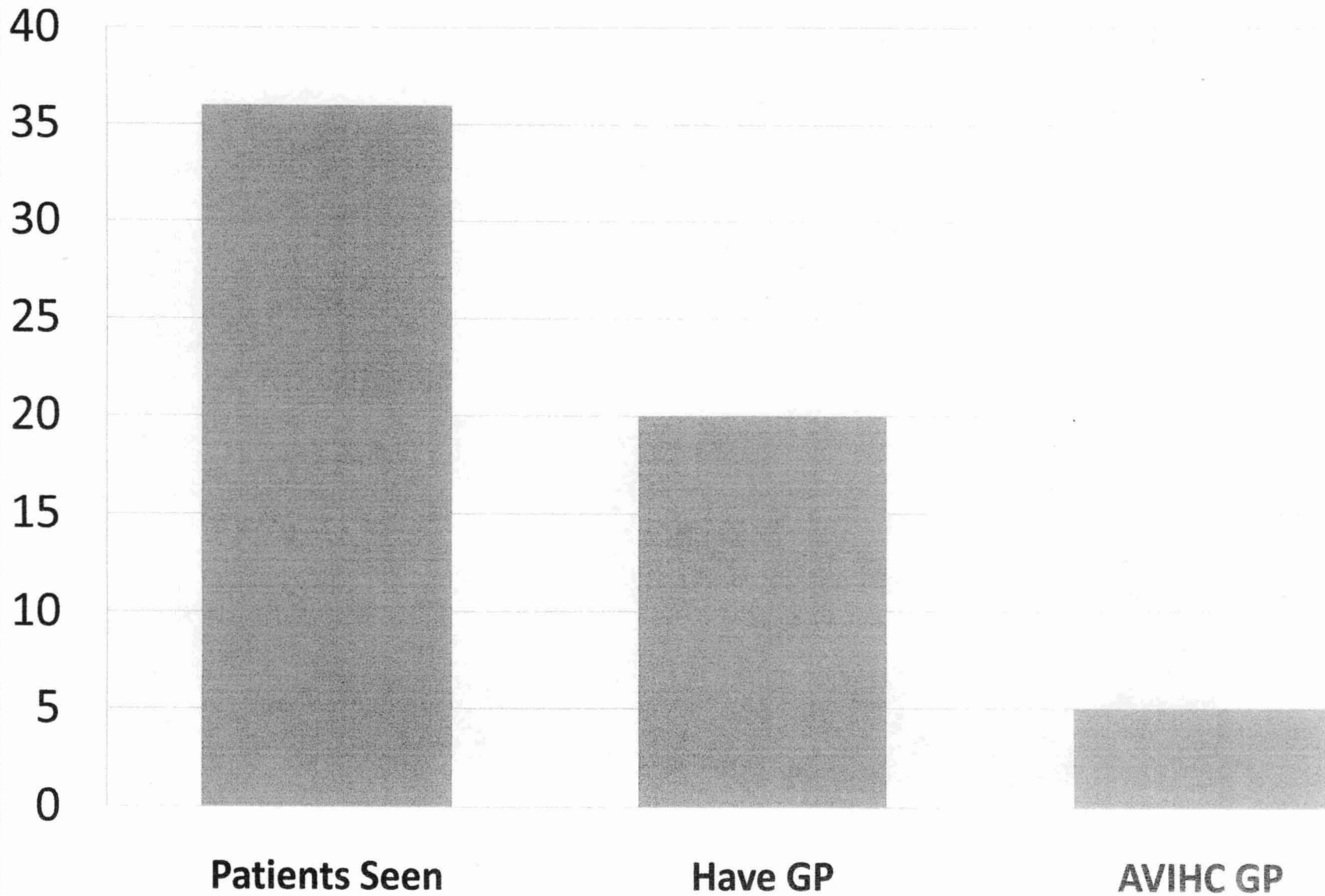
Present

As of May 2009 the AVI Health Centre started its HIV care clinic on the first Thursday of each month providing GP services to people living with HIV who do not have access to a family doctor and may be in are in need of a referral to an Infectious Disease specialist.

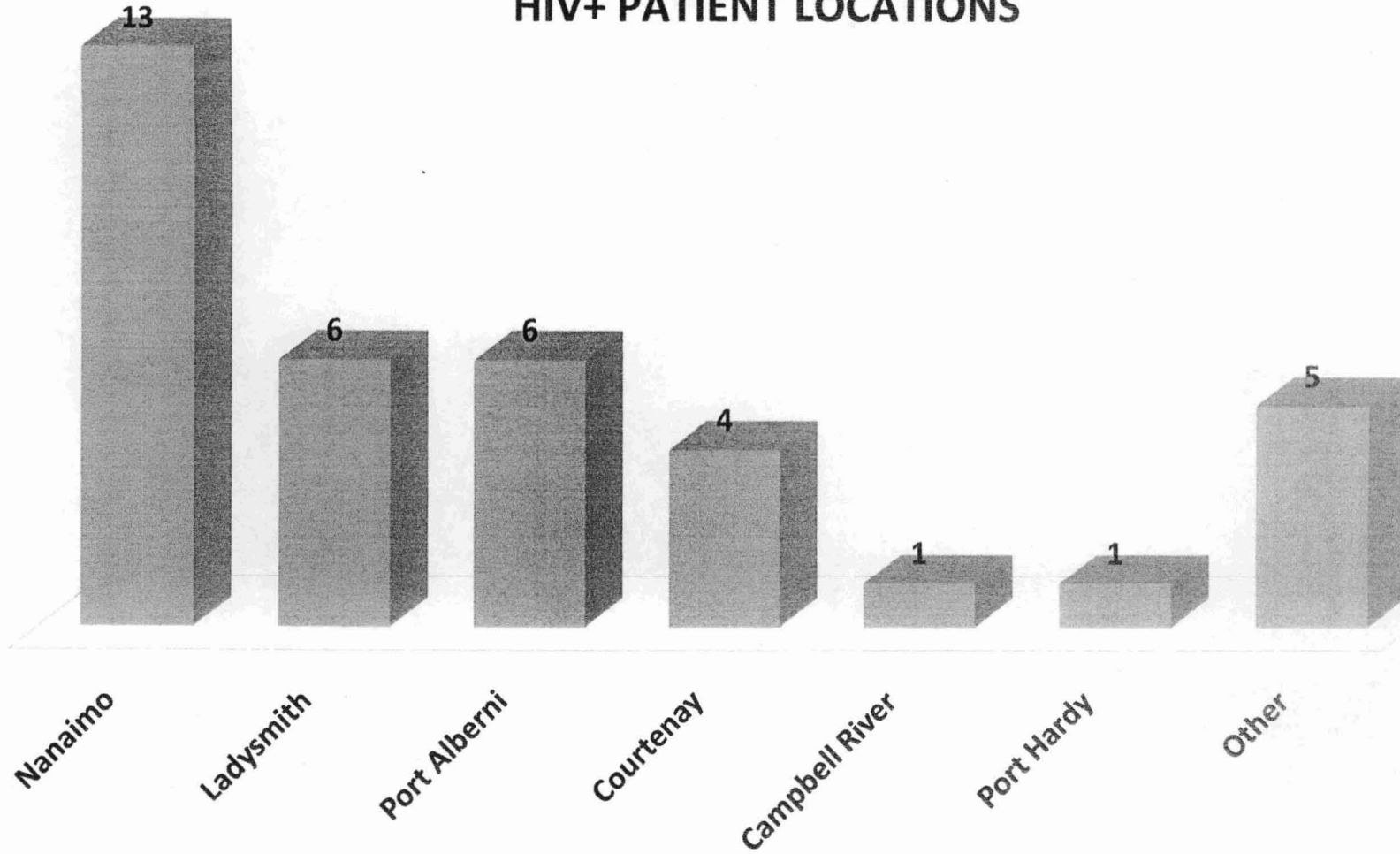
We have developed our own HIV monthly service as we believe it is very important to continue with this highly appreciated and needed care.

The HIV service team consists of the AVI Health Centre physicians: Dr. Keith Phillips, Dr. Mary Winder, Dr. Richard Roe and Fran Falconer RN.

AVIHC HIV+ Patients with and without primary care physicians



HIV+ PATIENT LOCATIONS



Anita Rosewall, Positive Wellness Counsellor, will also be available for advocacy and counselling.

This is a free service to anyone living with HIV and no referral is necessary.

Please see **Charts #4** for a look at our HIV treatment program.

The AVI Health Centre Team

Dr. Keith Phillips, our senior physician since Dec. 1 2003, is an established addictions specialist and family doctor practicing in Nanaimo. He brings extensive knowledge and experience in the field, and is committed to helping people improve the quality of their lives. He is the lead physician for our Hepatitis C treatment patients. He treats over 50 of our patients and the majority of the HCV treatment patients, **working 1 sessions a week**. He is currently on leave for the summer.

Dr. Mary Winder, a family doctor with a private practice in Nanaimo, brings with her much knowledge and experience in the area of Methadone treatment. She continues to be an active and great asset to our team. She treats about 35 of our patients, **working 1 session a week**.

Dr. Rick Roe, the newest member of our team, has a private practice in Nanaimo, and also works at the local Correctional Centre and Detox. We were very pleased to have him join our team. He now treats over 40 of our patients, **working 1 session a week**.

Munro Mabey, our addictions counsellor is an integral part of the care team providing intake and counselling for clients and brings consistency and strength to the Health Centre. Munro works **two days a week** to ensure that our services are available on a consistent basis. He brings with him more than 30 years of experience from the addictions field to assist our clients achieve their personal and health goals.

Fran Falconer RN our Hepatitis C support nurse, works very closely with Dr. Phillips providing Hepatitis C patient education and information as well as administering treatment to patients at the Health Centre. Providing Hepatitis C treatment through the AVI Health Centre has given Dr. Phillips and Fran Falconer RN the ability to provide what is termed as DOT or Directly Observed Therapy, which is a unique and extremely effective way to deliver this challenging treatment. Fran works **1 day a week**.

Maren McLean RN is our new nurse that provides support to patients through personal contact in the waiting area, one on one time, immunization tracking and administering, PAPs, STI testing, wound care, etc. Maren works approximately 18 hours a week.

Trish Kambeitz is our medical office assistant and receptionist. She offers a warm and stable front office environment and enjoys contact with our patients, as they do with her. Theresa's background working in a methadone dispensing pharmacy has proven to be a great asset to our organization.

Dana Becker, Manger of the AVI Health Centre providing team support and facilitation, clinic fee and Medical Services Plan billing, staff contracts, pharmaceutical grants, and relief for the Medical Office Assistant. She also provides patient intakes and information technology support.

Together the AVI Health Centre staff makes an effective and caring team, providing a high standard of health care to this high-risk and complex population.

Submitted by Dana Becker –

Manager, AVI Health Centre

June 15, 2009