

The Interprofessional Rural Program of BC was launched in summer 2003 as a unique initiative towards the education of health professionals and the recruitment and retention of health care staff. The bulletin provides an update on our activities.

IRPbc set to launch second phase of rural community placements



IRPbc communities, phases one and two

Following the success of this summer's student health professional placements, the Interprofessional Rural Program of BC (IRPbc) is set to launch phase two in January 2004. The five communities involved will be Hazelton, Trail, Fort St. John/Dawson Creek, Port McNeill and Bella Coola.

Three of those communities – Hazelton, Port McNeill and Bella Coola – were involved in phase one of the program.

"Our student rural placement program is proving to be a great success," says IRPbc program manager Kathy Copeman-Stewart. "The students on the interprofessional teams tell us their work in the rural communities provides a tremendous learning experience, and the communities really appreciate the enhanced health care they get through the program."

What is IRPbc?

The Interprofessional Rural Program of BC offers a unique opportunity for students of health professional programs to experience work and life in a rural BC community. Students work in teams, supported by local health professionals, to provide care in the community.

The program is also demonstrating the benefits of interprofessional learning – a concept increasingly important in today's health care delivery. "By working together in teams, students from different health professions become familiar with other disciplines and learn a great deal from

each other," says Dr. John Gilbert, principal of UBC's College of Health Disciplines and Chair of the IRPbc implementation team. "Patients benefit too, because there is a greater understanding of their condition when more than one perspective is involved."

In the first phase of IRPbc, a total of 20 students – from medical laboratory technology, medicine, nursing, occupational therapy, pharmacy, physical therapy, social work, and speech language pathology – formed the three teams. Recruitment is now underway for the 20-25 health professional students required for the five communities participating in phase two of the program.

Student profile: Timberly George

What is Interprofessional learning?

Interprofessional learning is much more than teamwork. The concept, which is increasingly popular in the most innovative health care settings, applies to an educational opportunity during which health professional students from a variety of disciplines learn from, with and about each other.

New skills, new friends, and a new appreciation for British Columbia are among the benefits Timberly George experienced in her five-week summer placement with IRPbc.

The 30-year-old UBC physiotherapy student, who returned from Hazelton in mid-August, says she'd recommend the program "in a minute" to health professional students considering an IRPbc placement.

"One of the best things was the interaction with my team members from different

disciplines," says Timberly, who worked with occupational therapy, social work, nursing, speech language pathology and medical students to provide care in both Hazelton and nearby Smithers. "It's such a close-knit collaboration; you really learn a lot from each other."

Each of the students was mentored by a local health professional, or "preceptor." "I learned how diverse a rural health practitioner's skills need to be," says Timberly, who grew up in White Rock and whose work experiences prior to the summer were all in the Lower Mainland. "In the bigger cities, health professionals tend to specialize in certain areas, but you can't do that in a smaller town where there are fewer health professionals dealing with all kinds of health issues."

Timberly has eight months in her degree program, after which she says she'll spend a few years travelling and working on short-term placements or casual work before settling down permanently. "Being in Hazelton for the summer really opened my eyes to what we have in this province, and I'd really like to explore more of it," she says.



Physiotherapy student Timberly George enjoyed a summer in Hazelton as part of IRPbc's first placement



The Minister of Health Planning, Sindi Hawkins, visited Hazelton on July 30, 2003 to meet with the student team and community members.

Perspectives from the Communities

"The Interprofessional Rural Program is excellent for the participants and the communities in which they function. It provides a great work opportunity in which students experience life in a new community and develop their interdisciplinary knowledge with each other. This is a worthwhile program which should be maintained and expanded."

Gerry Furney, Mayor, Town of Port McNeill

"The members of the IRP Hazelton team had a terrific summer...I have nothing but enthusiastic feedback from all their primary preceptors – who without fail would love to participate in a similar manner again in future!" – Dr. Bent Hougesen, Hazelton

"It's wonderful to have young people with lots of energy here. Their questions make us stop and think exactly why we do something a certain way: it's very stimulating."

– Lorinda Andersen, Bella Coola General Hospital

"The Interprofessional Rural Program enriched the Hazelton community by exposing us to the skills and interest of the students, and energized our health care providers by allowing them to share their knowledge with students. I am convinced that all of us, communities and students, are richer in many ways because of this program."

– Alice Maitland, Mayor, Hazelton

IRPbc Implementation Team

IRPbc is funded by the Ministry of Health Planning and coordinated by the BC Academic Health Council. The program is overseen by an implementation team whose members represent communities, post-secondary institutions and the Ministries of Health Planning, Health Services, and Advanced Education.

John Gilbert, CHAIR – College of Health Disciplines, University of British Columbia

Anne Ardiel – Ministry of Health Services

Lorinda Andersen – Bella Coola General Hospital

BC Academic Health Council

The BC Academic Health Council works to optimize relationships/interactions among health educators, practitioners, researchers and their organizations. Members are BC's six health authorities, post-secondary institutions, Ministries of Health Services, Health Planning, Advanced Education and Children and Family Development.

Granger Avery – UBC Community-based Rural Training Program, Port McNeill

Lesley Bainbridge – Interprofessional Education Committee, UBC

Julie Brown – Ministry of Health Planning

Grant Charles – Clinical Education Committee, UBC

Ethel Davis, Health Match BC

Angela de Smit – Fort St. John Hospital

George Eisler – BC Academic Health Council

Johanne Fort – Ministry of Advanced Education

Bent Hougesen/Alfred Laskowski – UBC Community-based Rural Training Program, Hazelton

Craig Knight – Ministry of Health Planning

Elizabeth MacLeod – Speech-language pathology, UBC

Peter Martin – Northern Health Authority

Mary Ellen Purkis – University of Victoria

Shelley Tiffin – BC Institute of Technology

Linda Sawchenko – Kootenay Boundary Regional Hospital, Trail

Jocelyne Van Neste-Kenny – Nurses Education Council of BC

Jean Wheeler – Vancouver Island Health Authority

Carl Whiteside – Community-Based Rural Program, UBC Department of Family Practice

Program support

Kathy Copeman-Stewart – IRPbc Program Manager

Carol Wilson – IRPbc Placement Coordinator

Brenda Sawatzky-Girling – Research Consultant

Thanks!

Community involvement is key to the success of our rural placement program. IRPbc is grateful to the health professionals and community members of Hazelton, Bella Coola and Port McNeill for the warm welcome and support they provided for our inter-professional student teams during the summer.

For more information:

Visit www.bcahc.ca/irpbc

Or contact Kathy Copeman-Stewart, program manager, at 604 230-2524 or kcopeman@telus.net