



UNBC opens new physio lab

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Prince George Citizen

Regan Daoust got to show off the brand new physiotherapy lab at UNBC to her fellow UBC master of physical therapy students on Friday.

Daoust, a second-year student and part of the northern and rural pilot project, demonstrated how the lab will be used as a training tool for students who come to Prince George for their placements.

With a state-of-the-art video link to a group of students watching from UBC's Vancouver campus, Daoust provided patient Eira Olausen with some balance and range of motion exercises during the official unveiling of the facility.

"This plinth lab will be a resource to help us practice our skills, if we want to practice them while on placement," Daoust said.

A Prince George native and UNBC grad, Daoust finished her third of six five-week placements on Friday at Physionorth.

She still has 11 months to go in the 26-month intensive program at UBC and is set to graduate in November 2013.

The first big influx of students coming to Prince George on placement will be in April when the 20 students enrolled in the first full northern and rural cohort reach that stage of their education. They'll be able to use the lab, which includes nine specialized treatment tables called plinths, to practice the skills they're learning during their apprenticeship with a local physiotherapist.

"We offer additional support and enhancement to that [hands on] learning," UBC co-ordinator of clinical education for the northern and rural cohort Robin Roots said.

"We will also be using it to connect with our students who are [doing placements] outside of Prince George, and the video connectivity allows us to do that."

The cost of the lab - which included planning, equipment and renovations to rooms at UNBC and UBC for video conferencing - reached \$842,000.

Roots said the lab will help to attract and retrain students in the region, which can help reduce the shortage of the professionals in the region.

"We know from the evidence from the Northern Medical Program as well as from the literature, that in order to have health care professionals stay in rural areas, we need to train them in rural areas," Roots said. "The idea behind this plinth lab was really to provide training for both students as well as practicing physiotherapists in the north."

Northern Health reports 11 current vacancies for physiotherapists, but local practitioner Terry Fedorkiw said that just scratches the surface. Once historically vacant positions with the health authority, plus those in private practice are factored in, the list of openings gets much longer.

"This is huge because we have such a shortage of physiotherapists right across the north, we're short right through the continuum of life -from the cradle to the grave," Fedorkiw said. "We have the Canada Games coming up and we'll need physio for that and with all the industry coming up here now, we need to keep the economy going and who better than physiotherapists for assessing workers and getting them back to work in a timely manner."

Fedorkiw said she's also looking forward to taking of the professional development opportunities the facility will create.

"If there's a course on in Vancouver, we'll be able to video conference it in," she said. "You know how much it costs to go to Vancouver, how much your flight is, how much your accommodation is, and you have the price of the course on top of it. Now you just have the price of the course -it's awesome."

At the same event, Prince George-Valemount MLA Shirley Bond announced the province would provide permanent funding for the rural nursing certificate program at UNBC.

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